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VILIS

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Har Rodziewicz

ANIMA VILIS

*A TALE OF THE GREAT
SIBERIAN STEPPE*

BY

MARYA RODZIEWICZ

TRANSLATED BY

S. C. DE SOISSONS

SANS PEUR ET
SANS REPROCHE



LONDON: JARROLD & SONS

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

FROM the natural condition of things, all questions touching either directly, or indirectly, on the subject of existence in Russia, have for some time past created so much interest, that we cannot follow too closely anything that will help us to a better knowledge and understanding of the Empire of the Czar.

For years we have hurled all kinds of anathemas at the Russian nation on account of the cruelties practised on Siberian prisoners; we have abused her lack of liberty, her tyranny, etc. Europeans, however, have formed their opinions of Russia from the "cannibalistic newspaper articles," as Prince Wolkonsky has very rightly designated them in the preface to his lectures on Russian Literature.

In 1888, I went to Russia with my friend, Count Nicolas Potocki. As soon as my project was made known, many of my friends inundated me with advice of various kinds. In particular,

I was not to take any books with me, for those savage Russians would certainly confiscate them at the frontier, and I might experience some trouble; this I was told by one well informed on the subject of persecution in the Russian Empire. But as I have ever considered it the best plan to listen to all advice, and then follow one's own inclinations, my trunk contained several volumes. On arriving at the frontier, all the passengers were conducted into a large hall, where their luggage was to be inspected, and I was at once impressed by the courteous manners of the Customs House officials. Saluting me in military fashion, one of them inquired :

"What have you in here?" he pointing to one of my trunks as he spoke.

"Books," I replied.

"Harasho! (all right,) and what is in this?"

"My clothes and linen."

"Harasho!"

And, to my great astonishment, he did not even touch my things.

It happened that during our journey we passed over the same line of railroad as that on which the Czar was travelling on his way to Spala, where there was to be a hunting party. Everyone was at liberty to do as he pleased and go where he wished. The presence of dragoons

here and there along the line was the only indication that anything unusual was taking place. Yet on my return to France (this was before the friendship between France and Russia), I learned that all the papers had been full of "cannibalistic articles," describing how all the passengers had been locked into the railway-stations during the Czar's journey, and stating that no one was allowed his liberty until after the Czar's train had passed.

But the many proofs of perfect freedom of movement and action that I witnessed during my journey through Russia, have had this result, that since my return I believe nothing I read concerning the cruelty and oppression practised in that country. It is not my intention to advocate an absolute monarchy, although there is much to be said about the freedom enjoyed by those living in countries having a constitutional government, and in which the snare of some criminal accusation can be laid for a person whom one is desirous to be rid of, and the person so accused can be imprisoned with the appearance of everything having been done according to the law of the land. I could cite many instances to prove the truth of this assertion.

Desiring to destroy the false ideas concerning

the Russian Empire that have become so deeply rooted in the minds of most persons, we decided that the best way to accomplish our purpose would be by a novel based on life in Siberia, and this novel was written by Miss Marya Rodziewicz, a noted Polish writer. It is well known that there is not much sympathy between the Russians and Poles. But, at the same time, there is an honesty of purpose in those serious and earnest Polish writers, which, notwithstanding the wrongs their country has suffered at the hands of the Russians, would prevent their stooping to falsify facts. Thus Miss M. Rodziewicz's views of life in Siberia are more worthy of credence than the scribblings of those writers who, for the sake of creating a sensation, and its usual accompaniment, the desire of making money, relate blood-curdling stories of the barbarism of Russia.

I know that there is a deep-rooted love of truth in the hearts of all true Anglo-Saxons, and I am convinced that they will be pleased that some of their erroneous ideas concerning that vast country, where a hundred million inhabitants are ruled by one man, should receive correction.

This translation will serve another noble purpose, it will make the English-speaking people familiar with a Polish author who,

although she does not write so powerfully as the fantastically heroic Henryk Sienkiewicz, yet possesses great literary merit.

The majority of the English public know very little of Poland and her literature. Poland has been most unjustly forgotten, or, at least, treated lightly by the civilised nations, who do not remember, or who, perhaps, never knew that had it not been for the Poles, who stood shoulder to shoulder, like a Chinese wall, against the barbarians of the North and East, Western Europe would never attained to that degree of civilisation that it enjoys to-day; for, save for the Poles, they would have been obliged to fight against the Turks, Tartars, and Cossacks, instead of cultivating art, science, and letters. But, in the meantime, although always at war, the Poles did not forget their literature, which, in the fifteenth century, was on a level with that of other nations, and her literary strength is powerfully expressed in the writings of the popular author of "*Quo Vadis*."

My assertion could easily be proved by the recital of numerous names famous in literature, and I am certain that scholars, and indeed all persons of taste and refinement would agree with me, could they only become acquainted with the *belles lettres* of those "Northern Frenchmen," as

the French love to call that chivalrous and polished people—or rather the cultivated portion of them, the nobility.

A few words about the author of "*Anima Vilis*" will naturally prove interesting to the readers of this work. I do not, however, intend to dwell at any length on the literary achievements of Miss Marya Rodziewicz, who has written several novels possessing real artistic value, but she has one peculiarity that I should like to point out. Although evidently not thinking much of men in general, for she has preferred to remain single and "independent," at least so she has written me, she nevertheless likes to take as her principal heroes, men, who, in addition to their individual characteristics, possess the general virtues with which the author endows them. Great strength of will, perseverance, self-possession, a strict adherence to the end in view, concentration of the faculties, a high ideal of duty, such are the host of good qualities required by Miss Rodziewicz for her ideal man, whom, however, she has failed to find in real life.

One reads her books with great interest, and their influence is invigorating and refreshing. I well remember, and I shall never cease to be grateful to the author, for certain truths that I have taken from "*Anima Vilis*" and applied to

practical life. Besides this, her novel has taught me more about the true and actual life in Siberia than can be learned from the gloomy pictures drawn by Mr. Kennan; the bright enthusiasm of Mr. de Windt, or that very instructive book by Mr. James Young Simpson.

Miss Marya Rodziewicz's position in the literary world is all the more interesting, from the fact that she is not a professional writer. She does not write as we do, that she may earn her livelihood by her pen; she modestly calls herself a "dilettante," and only writes in the moments she can spare from the arduous task of personally administering a large estate, situate in Zmudz, a former province of Poland. May we have more such earnest dilettanti, say I, for then we should have fewer *cabotins*.

S. C. DE SOISSONS.

ANIMA VILIS.

CHAPTER I.

THIRTY degrees of cold, reckoned according to Reumer's system, was not very painful owing to the absence of all wind. It seemed that the currents of air were frozen, and on the white ocean of snow no movement could be seen, nor slightest whisper caught.

The public highway leading across this vast space, and marked at every verst by a post, shone like a mirror; here and there on the horizon some poor bush could be seen, but nowhere a larger tree, nor any trace of men; it was a clear night, because of the snow, but neither moon nor stars showed in the heavens, it seemed as though their rays were also frozen.

During the night, however, a man was walking alone along this endless road. He was warmly clad and walked briskly; he still had some warmth in him, gained at the last post-station, where he had stopped before nightfall.

The official looked at his passport, found it correct, and asked where he wished to go.

"To the village of Lebiaza."

"It is not on the government road, but all the same I can give you post horses."

"How far is this village?"

"About forty versts."

"Is there any other village on the way?"

"Yes, about ten versts from here, there is Petrofska. Do you wish for horses?"

The traveller blushed, hesitated, and then answered,

"No, thank you; I will go on foot."

It was very strange; but a man who possesses a legal passport and travels without police escort is entitled to his peculiarities, so the official therefore did not insist, but merely said,

"You had better have something to eat—have some tea."

The traveller consented. In such cold, and at night, it was better to walk with an empty pocket, than to ride with an empty stomach. So he had something to eat, and paid for it. After that there remained only twenty kopeks in his pocket-book. Then he went forward boldly.

After a while the red light of the post-house

became smaller, then it disappeared. The traveller walked softly in his felt boots, and only the sound of his stick on the hardened snow was heard from time to time. At first he did not care, nor was he afraid of anything; he was warm and joyful. There were no posts to indicate the versts, but it seemed to him that ten versts was a small distance, and at any moment he expected to see the village. He had passed so many hundreds—thousands of versts; what then were ten? But he stepped out, quickening his steps, as he perceived something gray in the distance; on approaching, however, it turned out to be bushes, and disappointed, he slackened his pace.

Through constantly looking at the snow, and because of the cold, his eyes slowly filled with tears, and burned as with fire; when he closed his eyelids, they immediately froze; he rubbed them with his rough glove, and then noticed that his fingers had become stiff. His neck itched, from being pressed by a heavy sheep-skin overcoat—the snow creaked beneath the soles of his boots. Then he slipped and fell. The same moment his overcoat accidentally opened, and the cold air struck his chest. He wrapped himself up carefully, and beat his side with his hands, but warmth had gone for ever.

Again and again he trembled and shivered ; he began to run, but soon tired.

He stopped for a while and looked behind him. Should he return? The instinct of self preservation drew him in that direction ; but ambition and desperate energy urged him forward. He gathered his forces together, bent forward, and went on.

Fear and weakness seized him ; he began to hum with blue lips, but it seemed to him, that with the air, he swallowed pieces of ice, and he ceased. Finally he walked like a machine ; he thought of wolves, of highway robbers, of death. One of these alternatives would befall him ; but which? Perhaps all three by turns : robbers would take his clothes, the cold his life, the wolves his body. He now walked slowly and became sleepy. It seemed to him that he had walked not ten, but a hundred versts ; perhaps he had lost his way? The road was hardly visible. He lost all strength and courage.

He stopped, looking around with eyes half-asleep, and whispered to himself,

"It was my destiny to come here and stop. I shall never return alive to the people. I am lost."

Once again he looked for some object on

the steppe—for some hope, but could perceive nothing. Then he sat down on the ground and abandoned himself to his fate. While he was slowly dying, the dead emptiness was broken by sounds; it was the ringing of bells, and happily for him he heard it. He sprang from the ground; perhaps they rang only in his ears!

No, it was salvation; there were lights. He could already hear the hard stamping of the horses, and for him the bells rang the moment of resurrection. He cried with a hoarse voice, and then ran towards the noise, fearing to be passed by. But the black spot on the snow stopped, and someone answered his call. Everything grew black before his eyes, unearthly joy overwhelmed him.

A troyka (a team of three horses) came towards him, reached him and stopped.

"Who are you? Why do you shout?" asked the coachman.

"For Heaven's sake, help me!" he said, afraid he would be refused. "How far is it from here to Petrofka?"

"Three versts; we are going there."

"Take me then. I will give you twenty kopeks."

"Pani" (madam), and the coachman turned,

"let him sit with us. Even if he be a murderer, he will not get rid of us both."

The lady said,

"Sit down beside me; are not your hands or feet frozen?"

"I don't know. It seemed to me I was dying."

"Such cold as this is trifling," growled the coachman, "you must be a stranger."

"Yes, I come from Europe."

"Aha! Well, sit down. It's none of our business."

The man was about to sit down, when a threatening bark resounded from the sleigh.

"There is a dog," said the traveller, "will he not bite me?"

"Well, it's not his fault that you are a thief or a murderer," said the coachman indifferently. "He wouldn't do any harm to a good man."

At this the man slipped his hand into the sleigh and touched the dog, who raised its head, smelt the hand, and stopped barking. The stranger sat quietly.

"Well, don't be angry that I suspected you," said the coachman, whipping the horses; "the dog was barking before he smelt you."

They rushed along like the wind. Neither of the two spoke a word; consequently the traveller

was also silent. The dog lay at his feet, its green eyes gleaming in the darkness. Suddenly the red lights of houses shone forth; they were stopping before an inn.

"Here is Petroska; where would you like to stop?" said the lady.

The traveller alighted and stumbled. He opened his overcoat, pulled out his purse and handed her his last money.

"I thank you for having saved my life," said he, ashamed of the small pay.

The coachman burst into a laugh, the lady shrugged her shoulders.

"Keep your money! I am satisfied with your thanks."

Then she turned to the coachman, and said, in a voice accustomed to command,

"I shall be ready in half an hour, let the horses wait just here. Cover them up."

She then alighted, and an enormous yellow dog jumped out behind her; she entered the inn.

The traveller followed her into the warm room. A few peasants, sitting there, glanced at him; they greeted the woman.

"I greet you, Marya Cazimierovna!"

"How are you?" she answered kindly.

From a bedroom the innkeeper appeared.

She stretched out her hand to him; he kissed it respectfully. The innkeeper's wife and children then entered, and all surrounded the woman as though she were an old acquaintance. The inn became animated.

The traveller sat down at a table, and asked a peasant,

"How far is it from here to Lebiaza?"

"About twenty versts."

"How much do they charge for a sleigh to go there?"

"One rouble."

The traveller dropped his head.

"Where are you going?" asked the peasant in his turn.

"To Lebiaza."

"Aha! To settle there?"

"I don't know."

"You are sent?"

"No." He pulled out his passport quickly, and showed it, but the peasants were not curious.

"How far from here do you come?" they asked him.

"From Europe. I have already been travelling three weeks."

"Marya Cazimierovna!" said one of the peasants, "this man wants to go to your village."

At that moment the traveller looked at the lady who had saved his life. Having removed her furs, she sat opposite the innkeeper, with a book and a pile of money before her. Evidently she was making out an account. She was young and sad; her eyes seemed tired from tears; her lips were closely shut, as though from great grief; her face was troubled, but full of dignity. She slowly raised her head and looked at the stranger. She now observed him for the first time. He had dark hair, and a broad, homely face, which was, however, beautified by youth, and a pair of dark eyes with a straightforward and honest look in them. He was tall, well-built, healthy, and strong.

Their glances met; he, looking as though ashamed of his misery and need, she, looking indifferently at him. She did not answer, but continued her accounts. Meanwhile her coachman brought a large barrel and a well-filled bag into the room. The innkeeper's wife took these from him and carried them into the bedroom. The coachman sat down beside the stranger, drinking a glass of tea which had been given him. They began to talk, and the stranger treated him to whiskey, but drank nothing himself.

"You are going to Lebiaza; perhaps we shall meet you there," said he.

"Most likely. A village is not the world. To whom are you going?"

"To Doctor Gostynski."

"Well, no doubt we shall meet there. He is my master, and here is his daughter! Panienko!"* called he, "we have picked a guest from the snow."

This time the woman looked at him with more interest, and the traveller rose.

"I beg your pardon," said he, timidly as ever, "did your brother mention my name to you?"

"You are Antoni Mrozowiecki?"

"Yes, madam."

"My brother spoke of you, and was waiting for you," she answered sadly, her lips scarcely pronouncing the words, "but he is no longer with us."

She turned her head aside, and fought for a moment with her emotion.

"He died two weeks ago!" she added with an effort.

The traveller did not say a word. He turned toward the window, great tears dropping

* Diminutive of *Panna* = Miss.

from his eyes. The inn was silent as the tomb. Apparently the woman counted, but she did not see the ciphers, neither did she remember where she was. From the window the heavy breathing of the stranger was heard.

At length the innkeeper said,

"God's will! Do not cry, panienko."

And the coachman blew his nose noisily, adding,

"Death should take thieves. Why should it take him?"

The peasants shook their hands, and one of them said,

"It would have been better if it had taken the old man, and not the young. But we cannot help it—can we?"

The traveller did not change his position. Turned to the dark window, he complained to the night, weeping quietly, forgetting even his dreadful situation in the presence of this last blow. Someone spoke to him, but he did not comprehend—did not answer. Only when he felt a hand on his shoulder, he shivered and turned.

The girl stood before him, wrapped in her furs, ready to go; she was quite calm now.

"Let us be going," she said simply, as though it had been understood for a long time.

He obeyed silently.

He sat beside her in the sleigh and they galloped on.

"A month since, I had a letter from your brother," he said timidly.

"A few days after he took a cold, followed by inflammation of the lungs, which he was too weak to withstand. Everything passed with surprising rapidity. Oh, this winter! this winter! One must become accustomed to it. He was very delicate."

"How is your father?"

"He bears up," she answered gloomily. "How long is it since you left the country?"

"Three weeks."

"I have been here five years already—ever since my mother died. Father has been here twenty years."

"I am afraid I shall recall his grief with reminiscences of his son. It will, perhaps, be better if I do not go to your house, and you do not mention me to your father."

"We are not accustomed to dissimulate. We were waiting for you, and shall see you gladly. Anthony loved you."

"Thank you."

"Here we are, home already!" said the coachman.

In fact, the sleigh was in the village street, which was dark and empty. They stopped before a fence that separated a very comfortable, two-storied house from the street. There was a light in the house, and when the girl opened the gate, two large dogs rushed joyfully toward her; the door of the house opened, and a man with a lantern appeared; he was homely and thin, and showed his decayed teeth as he laughed.

"Good evening, Siergey. Open the door to Grynia," she said, taking the lantern from his hand.

They entered a hall, from which were steps leading to the upper storey.

Someone opened a door downstairs, from whence came warmth and the smell of the kitchen, and on the threshold appeared an old woman, a bonnet on her head.

"Is that you, Marya?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Thank God! I was uneasy already. I will serve supper immediately."

"Father alone?"

"Ksiondz (priest) Ubysh was with him, but I think he has gone."

In the first room upstairs the young girl took off her furs, as did also Mrozowiecki. He remained only in his leather vest and felt shoes,

much ashamed of such clothing and the lack of any valise. He trembled from fatigue and hunger.

"Come with me, please," said the young girl.

In the second room, warmed by a fire in the fire-place, sat old Doctor Gostynski. He stretched his hands toward his daughter, smiling sadly.

"Nothing bad happened to you?"

"No, father. I bring a guest with me, Pan (Mr.) Mrozowiecki."

The old man rose quickly. He was still strong and healthy, but his hair was snow-white. He approached the young man, looked at him, and without a word pressed him to his heart. They understood each other in that silence.

"Where did you meet my daughter?" asked the old man after a while.

Mrozowiecki blushed.

"I must tell you at once," said he. "In Tobolsk I had a very unpleasant accident. Being very tired, I entered the first inn I came to in order to rest for a couple of days, and the first day they stole my trunk and my money."

"You must thank God they did not kill you."

"They did not; they even left me fifteen roubles. I went by post as long as I had

money, and then, forty versts from here, I started to journey on foot."

"Crazy!"

"I over estimated my strength, and should have died had I not met your daughter."

The girl was no longer in the room.

"Well, you had a narrow escape. Are not your face or hands frozen?"

"No, I am all right."

"How do you like Siberia?"

"It is dreadful!" answered Mrozowiecki frankly.

"Oh, and what would you call it if, instead of this night, a snowstorm had greeted you?"

He spoke softly and rapidly, as though afraid the stranger would ask about his son; he realised that he must tell him, but had not sufficient strength. The new-comer, however, did not ask for his son.

They were not left long alone. A woman—the same he had seen downstairs—rushed into the room.

"You are from Europe?" she asked him impetuously, her eyes shining.

"From Vilna."

"My God! My God! I am sure you were kneeling in Ostra Brama."*

* A gate in Vilna, capital of Lithuania, where is a miraculous image of the Holy Virgin.

"The day of my departure."

"Then you saw the vicar there? He is my own brother."

"Yes, I saw him, and had I known of the relationship, I would have paid him a visit."

"Don't think he is their relation," said she, pointing to the host, "not at all—only mine. I am a stranger here; I belong to another family. My maiden name was Sheygwil; I was married to Utowich. The vicar Sheygwil is my brother. He must be old—it is twenty years since I came here with my husband! He must be grey?"

"The man I saw during mass had dark hair."

"Is it possible! Well, it is possible; in our family one does not become grey very soon. My hair is white; but it's on account of the climate."

She shook her head, and became thoughtful for a while, assured about her brother's dark hair. Then she said,

"He must be in good health, although he hasn't written to me for five years. Anthony promised me to inquire about him, but he forgot it, poor thing."

When the dead man's name was mentioned, Mrozowiecki looked timidly at the old man,

and shivered, for his look was returned. Again they understood each other in that mute glance, and the father was relieved. He would not be obliged to tell of his grief.

The old woman roused herself.

"I am talking and forgetting to tell you supper is ready. Grynja told me of your accident. Come to the dining-room. Marya will be there soon. She went to the store for a moment.

Mrozowiecki understood from this that she was the housekeeper, and when she had disappeared behind the door, the doctor, taking advantage of her absence, said,

"Her brother is not in Ostra Brama, but in the cemetery. But no need to talk about it to her—she has enough other grief! She is a widow and an orphan. For ten years she has lived with us. Her husband and two children died here."

They entered the dining-room. Panna Marya appeared and both sat at the table. Mrozowiecki could not eat for fatigue. Utowich asked him a hundred questions, and in the meanwhile Panna Marya told her father about her journey.

"In Krynka I got seventy roubles, and in Petroska fifty-three. Somebody must go tomorrow to Kurhan to get some vodka. I think

I shall go myself, as I need many things for the store."

"Perhaps it would be better to send Grynia with a letter to Shumski. He will do the errand."

"Always in the worst way. I prefer to do it myself."

"As you like. Have you prepared the room for our guest?"

"Will he stay with us?"

"Why not? We have an empty room."

The girl said nothing. She had risen and Mrozowiecki could hear her giving some orders to Sergey. After a while the women retired. The doctor pointed out the door of a room to the new-comer and said gloomily,

"This room is empty now. You will be comfortable here. You must excuse me from accompanying you, but I have not been inside it for two weeks."

Having said this he turned swiftly away.

The empty room was comfortably furnished, large and warm. The floor was covered with a carpet, and against the walls were suspended arms, skins, birds, odd clothes belonging to the Kirghizes, their monstrous idols, and many other things.

One could see it had been occupied by a

student—one with a high education and active disposition. The bookcase was filled with books and doctors' instruments.

But Mrozowiecki had not strength even to think of his dead friend. He fell asleep, and slept like a log.

CHAPTER II.

SIERGEY, in his cook's dress, stood beside the sleeping man. He was attended by a white cat, who also looked with curiosity on the bed.

Mrozowiecki awoke, and sprang up, startled by the clear daylight. Evidently he had overslept himself.

"What time is it?" asked he.

"No matter what time it is. You have slept forty-eight hours," answered the cook, smiling.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the young man, dressing hastily.

"Why impossible? When I am sick I can sleep thirty-six hours; is it not so, Katalay?"—he asked the cat. "The old woman sent me here to ask if you were not sick. The idea! A young man sick!"

"All at home?" asked Mrozowiecki.

"The old man went to visit his patients; the young girl went to the city on some errands; and the old woman sits in the store. It's always that way. The priest sits in the kitchen because

it is cold everywhere else. When the young man was living, he travelled, but he is no more. Well, Katalay, let us go and look after our cutlets."

He went towards the door, the cat after him.

"Did you notice how intelligent he is?"

"Who?"

"My Katalay. He could christen those Sibiraks."

"Are you not one of them?"

"Thank God, no! I am from Europe. I was cook in a restaurant in Moscow. Now I'm unhappy. Well, Katalay, jump!"

He stretched his foot out towards the cat, who jumped over it, then they went out.

Mrozowiecki dressed, and then stood at the window. Through it he could see the courtyard and barn, with, further on, an orchard, and beyond that, the interminable steppe.

The young man thought over his position. He had come to a friend, who had asked him to come. In Europe, he had lacked work and bread. "Here, if only one could get a little money, the business is ready." So the dead man, his good and true friend, had written. By hard work he had saved some money, and had come. He was now at the end of his journey, but without money and without friends. What

should he do? Pray for a while on his friend's tomb, and then return? But how? He had only fifteen kopeks, and all the clothing he possessed was on his back.

What should he do? What should he do? He thought, unable to move further—unable to find a logical way out of a humiliating situation. Must he then beg from strangers?

"How do you do?" sounded old Utowich's voice from the dining-room.

Awakened from his reverie, he rubbed his eyes and forehead, and came out to greet her.

"You are rested, thank the Lord! Come to the kitchen, please, and have your breakfast there—it's warmer."

They went to a large room, where Siergey, with Katalay, were housekeeping. At the table sat an old priest, drinking tea. Mrozowiecki saluted him, and Utowich performed the introduction.

"This is Ksiondz Ubysh, our boarder, and this is Pan Mrozowiecki, who, a month ago, was in Ostra Brama, and saw my brother, the vicar."

"I was also in Ostra Brama," answered the priest indifferently.

"When? A long time ago?" said the old woman.

"No matter! If I liked, I would go there again!" retorted the priest angrily.

The old woman pointed to her forehead, and then whispered,

"He has a wheel in his head! No wonder—such a climate!"

While serving breakfast to Mrozowiecki she said,

"Then you knew our Anthony? He was a good boy, and that's the reason he didn't live long. Poor Pan Doctor—he brought him up—and has nothing. Now he cannot forgive himself for bringing the boy to this climate. But it's always thus—when God gives one thing He doesn't give another. Fortune smiled on him. Oh, he is rich! He owns this house and plenty of land, and cows and horses. In business, too, he is lucky. During the summer he trades in cattle, and in the winter, in grain. Money flows into his coffers from everywhere. Even the store pays him well, and from the tap-houses he has a good income. Well, this good luck was injurious to Anthony! When he finished his studies in St. Petersburg and became a doctor, the father set his head on getting him here. So much work needed some help. True enough! And then, his heart was calling for him. Well, everything turned out badly. Poor thing! He

did not help long—he didn't work much; but the long grief remains, and many tears have flowed."

"He received the Sacrament!" added Ksiondz Ubysh quietly, nodding his head, as though he would say, "He has no more sorrow; he is better off thus."

"It's easy for you to say that. You didn't have any children of your own," brusquely answered Utowich.

"No, I didn't!" said the old priest. "I had a parish," and became gloomy at once.

"Now I pray every day for Marya. She is healthy, but delicate, and she must do her brother's work. Ah! these riches, these riches. They cause much sorrow! I don't know how it will end, for you must know she is betrothed to Shumski, who directs Shyshkin's whiskey distillery. He must stay here three years, after that he will probably go back and take her with him. What then can we both do with Pan Doctor?"

She grew thoughtful, but at this moment two peasants entered, asking for sulphur and tobacco.

"Come and see our store," she called to Mrozowiecki.

The store was situated behind the kitchen; it contained everything—sugar, tea, cotton, ropes,

leather, biscuits, and an endless variety of other things.

The peasants purchased some sulphur, and going out, they ate it as a sweetmeat. After them came some young girls, who asked for thread, soap, and face-powder. Looking at their rough and pock-marked faces, Mrozowiecki could not help smiling.

"Yes, they powder and rouge their faces," affirmed the old woman, "and think it looks very natural."

Mrozowiecki remained in the store, watching the interesting types of Siberian population. In general they were well-built, with honest faces. They were well-to-do, and looked like free citizens. Most of them had frozen noses and cheeks, and the continuous cold had a depressing effect on their spirits; they were not merry, and spoke but little. They were honest in their business transactions. Only once old Utowich began to scream, for someone gave her a counterfeit bank-note.

"I don't want such money. Do you think I am an idiot? Go to the steppe—to the Kirghizes with such money—not to me!"

As a rule, the business transacted was done in a quiet, agreeable way, without any quarrels. Soon Mrozowiecki even began to help, because

the old woman counted with difficulty. Then Siergey called her to the kitchen.

“My dear *panicz*”* (master), she said, as she went out, “the price is on every article. Kindly take my place for a moment.”

He remained there willingly. The work distracted his sad thoughts. He weighed and measured, gave the change, and was so busy that he heard neither the sleigh or its bells, nor did he notice that Panna Marya was looking into the store. Behind her stood a young man.

“Aunt!” called she, but immediately corrected herself; and, without showing any surprise, added in her determined but sad voice,

“Grynia will bring the goods I have purchased. Will you be so kind as to unpack them?”

“Very well, madam,” he answered, busy giving some change.

She went upstairs, followed by the stranger.

“By Jingo!” exclaimed the latter, laughing, “Anthony had original taste! So that is his chosen friend! What an original passenger—a real scarecrow! He looks like a combination of country-parish and helplessness. What a peach!”

* Diminutive of *Pan* (Lord); *Panicz*, son of a Lord.

"But you have hardly seen him," said Panna Marya.

"It's enough for me. I have particular talent as a physiognomist! One glance, and I know what a man is worth. In our century of great movements and changes, only he knows something who seizes upon things immediately. I have such knowledge."

With great gallantry he helped her to take off her furs.

"Father is not yet back. He must have many patients."

They both entered the library, the young man being very familiar, as a future husband, and he fulfilled his part right zealously.

"You are cold! Poor little hands!" said he. "When will the time come that I shall be able to keep them idle?"

"It will never come," she answered.

"My dearest! Do not take away my dreams! I dream of it day and night. I will make you a queen, a goddess, in my house. I will place you on an altar of worship and sentiment. You need not even give me orders—everything shall be done in advance. I will not suffer any cloud to darken that white forehead, nor the slightest work with these little hands. Yes! I will do everything for you!"

Panna Marya only raised her eyebrows and smiled.

"Such a programme is not for me. I look on it as a joke, because you know me, and are aware I couldn't accept such a part. I am not made to be a goddess, but a helpmeet to a man."

"So it seems to you. Life in Siberia changes everyone into some inferior being, working like an ox. But I shall not live here when our happiness is complete. I shall not stay one day longer than I must. I will take my treasure to dear Warsaw. There's a different life—society, activity! They would point their fingers at me, did I allow my wife to work. We are well-to-do people; I can afford to indulge myself in some luxury."

"You mustn't count me in for the luxury. Well, we had better not talk about it—it's so far off yet."

She took an account book from the desk, and began to write in it. Pan Shumski, standing before the mirror, adjusted his cravat and twisted his moustaches. Then he began to hum. On hearing the humming the young girl made a grimace, but he, in his excitement, did not notice that he was doing an improper thing. He only stopped humming on hearing the doctor's footsteps.



"I am glad you are here," said the doctor, addressing him. "What news? Your distilleries are working well?"

"I have great results! I have brought the money for the rye. We are waiting for some more."

"Very well! I will go to Shchedrynsk tomorrow to get it. And how are my oxen?"

"They grow fatter while one looks at them."

"I cannot look personally after everything, but I rely on you, and hope that everything is all right. Marya, please have supper served. Where is Mrozowiecki?"

"He is busy in the store."

"Already? You soon gave him something to do."

"It was not I. It must have been aunt."

"Who should work, if not he," said Shumski.

"Why, do you know him?"

"I have seen him; that is enough for me."

"Well, what do you think of him?"

"In two words—*anima vilis!*"

"You are going too fast."

"That's my opinion about him, and to prove to you that I am not mistaken, I shall question him at table. You will see, he will not understand anything fine, and I shall be able to cut

him like a hippopotamus. I have great talent for such things."

"Oh, you Gascon!" said the doctor indulgently. "What do they say about yarmark (market day) in Kurhan?"

"They say business will be good. Have you anything for sale?"

"Only butter and oxen."

"You will make some money."

"I shall spend it immediately, for I am going to purchase some more oxen, and put them in your distilleries to get fattened. I must go to the steppe. Too much work for an old man like myself."

He said this with great self-satisfaction, but Shumski did not understand the real meaning of his words, and said,

"You are working too hard. You ought to rest. You have plenty of money already."

"It is not a question of money. I have enough of that, as you say, but if I had nothing to do I should think of my misfortune, and I cannot do that, because I have another child, and I must live and die in a Christian way. Marya, take this money for the rye, and put it down in the books. Here is your receipt, sir."

Old Utowich here announced that dinner would soon be ready. Shumski helped her lay

the table, teasing her all the while. He joked about Ksiondz Ubysh, and filled the house with laughter, which sounded strange, remembering their recent loss; but these sturdy people became accustomed to his liveliness, and perhaps they liked him on account of his joyful disposition.

Panna Marya found a moment to run downstairs to the store, where Mrozowiecki was unpacking the goods.

"It was too bad of aunt to make you work so soon," said the girl.

"I am glad of it, otherwise I should have nothing to do," he answered sadly. "I haven't worked for a long time. I am surprised myself, to think that I can be useful. In my country I was accustomed to seeing how people waited for any kind of work."

"You will not see it here! But enough for to-day. Let us be going to dinner. We have a guest—a countryman also."

"Is it Pan Shumski?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"No; but Pani Utowich told me that he is superintendent of several distilleries. I thought I might perhaps get a position through him. I am a mechanical engineer."

"As you like," she answered, shrugging her shoulders, which, with her, meant dissatisfaction.

They entered the dining-room, and the doctor shook hands with him cordially. Shumski saluted from afar. While drinking vodka and eating caviare before dinner, they came to a skirmish at once.

Mrozowiecki, tired and bashful, did not retort with a single joke.

"What are you going to do here? Conquer Siberia, hey? I am sure you are a specialist; in Europe they did not appreciate your talents?"

"I know how to work," answered the newcomer timidly, but his face did not express any anger at such a humiliating examination.

"And in what branch have you been the star, hey? Parents petted you? It must be dreadful for you here?"

"I have no parents."

"How, then, could you come into this world? From wind, or steam?"

Mrozowiecki looked steadily at Shumski, but did not move.

"I don't know about the other way. I graduated at an Institute of Technology," he answered quietly, eating meanwhile.

At this everybody smiled. Panna Marya glanced at him. Shumski was right, his was a heavy mind! Why did Anthony love and esteem him so much? For his docility and probity, assuredly.

"I am sure you studied well; have a splendid memory and think quickly! No doubt you got through two classes every year."

"I never knew it was permitted. Perhaps there are such phoenixes. I studied at the Gymnasium seven years exactly."

"O—o—oh! How well you calculated. Seven classes—seven years! Mathematical head! And how old were you when you finished at the Gymnasium?"

"Seventeen."

"Well, well. Ordinarily, at that age one is a perfect ass!"

Here Ksiondz Ubysh created a diversion by asking to have the beetroot passed.

"Beetroot! I want some beetroot!" cried he, like a capricious child.

They gave him some, and then Mrozowiecki said,

"I am sure you are from Warsaw?"

"How did you guess it?"

"I worked in a factory in Warsaw. I know the people—they are jolly."

"You were in Warsaw! How did you get along there? I am sure you were lionized by the women and manufacturers."

"No, I worked one year in a railroad machine shop."

"You held the position of a director, at least?"

"No, a mechanical engineer."

"Pi, pi! Direct from a Gymnasium. It's very smart indeed."

"I was already through with my military service. It was about two years ago."

"And now I am sure you will tell us something about women!"

"Nothing of great interest. Everybody passes through it, studies, gets some position, and gets married."

"Then you are married. I am yours with due reverence!" and he bowed ironically.

Mrozowiecki saluted him with dignity.

"Thank you, but that will only be necessary later. I have only a fiancée."

"Then send her my respects. I am sorry not to be able to make her acquaintance. Then you contemplate building a nest here?"

"God knows," answered the new-comer laconically. "I should like to find some occupation here. Perhaps in your distilleries there might be some position for me?"

"Ah, my dear sir, having profited by sad experiences, we ask for qualifications, testimonials, diplomas, trials, proofs! We need specialists. Self-made men don't pay!"

"That is true," assented Mrozowiecki, "but

up to this time wherever I have worked they have been satisfied with me. Only the great competition in our country drove me here. I have diplomas and certificates, and if your employer wishes, I can produce them."

"Oh, my employer is not accustomed to decide anything without me. Well, I will remember your request. Perhaps I shall be able to make some use of you."

The doctor and his daughter took no part in the conversation. They did not care for this kind of joking, and only old Utowich laughed from time to time, or the priest burst into untimely idiotic laughter.

At length they rose from the table. Mrozowiecki, embarrassed, prepared to go to his room, not wishing to intrude upon the family gathering, but the doctor called him.

"Don't you smoke?" he asked.

"No, thank you," was the evasive reply.

He was an inveterate smoker, but was ashamed to smoke someone else's tobacco, when he was too poor to buy any.

He remained with them awhile, and then went downstairs. The old woman was glad to see him in the store again, and immediately gave him her place. She had plenty to do in the kitchen. He sat there patiently. He saw

Shumski leave; he saw Panna Marya always busy about the house. At length, toward evening, the doctor came down.

"Well, how is business?" he asked, sitting down beside him.

"Very good, as far as I can judge."

"Business was better when I only had a store, but now there are three others in the village. We also have competition."

Some customers came in—among them some dignified old farmers. They began to talk.

"So, Casimir Stanislovovich, you have brought another son from Europe? Well, this is a smart boy. He will be stronger than the other. With this help you will be able to do more business."

The doctor shook his head.

"This is not my son, but a countryman come to visit us."

"Don't let him go back. He must help you. Take him for your son, since God has taken the other. Drive the man with the yellow beard—then again will you have strength with you. You are old, and can't look after everything, and the girl, though she is smart and hardworking, can't do as well as a boy. This one looks smart; he will be a man."

"That's not the way we do business, Nikito Ivanovich."

"Why not? It's an honest business."

He slapped Mrozowiecki on the shoulder protectingly, and added,

"Why should you go back? Our country is good. You listen to Casimir Stanislovovich, and you will be all right."

He paid for the goods he had purchased and went out. The doctor was silent, and stood looking through the window. Mrozowiecki was embarrassed, and to regain his composure began to make out his accounts.

Panna Marya brought a lamp and helped him. She did this quickly and skilfully, hardly speaking a word. The day was ended. She asked their guest to go upstairs with her father, while she locked the store.

Mrozowiecki went for a moment to his room, then returned to the dining-room, and gazed through the window at the empty street. The lamps were not yet lighted, and he thought no one was near until he heard Panna Marya's voice in the doctor's room.

"Father, don't weep. You must not weep. My dearest, I know I cannot replace him, but you know how I love you!"

"I remember that I have you. I remember it well. You see, I am calm during the day, but this hour of dusk—it belongs to us. You weep

sometimes too. Let me then rid my eyes of the fire that burns them. How long is it now since——?”

“Seventeen days. I wonder how we have survived.”

“Only half of you remained. You can’t sleep.”

“No, father.”

“We don’t work enough. We must work more—more! Work will help us forget our sorrow! Do you remember, about this time he used to sing to us?”

“Yes, I remember. He read aloud to us, or told us about Europe. Now how long and tedious the evenings are. My Lord! How dreadful it must be for him in that strange cemetery.”

There was a long silence. The girl laid her head on her father’s shoulder, and his tears flowed on her dark head. Then a soft sobbing filled the room. It was already dark.

Suddenly old Utowich brought a lamp into the dining-room.

“Where are the *panstwo*?* I am going to serve the tea.”

“Can I help you?” asked Mrozowiecki.

“With pleasure. I hope that drunkard will

* Plural of Pan and Pani or Panna.

freeze to death to-night. Come to the kitchen. The samovar is too heavy for me to carry."

After a while Mrozowiecki brought in a steaming samovar, and the lamps were lighted in the doctor's office.

Panna Marya sat in the dining-room, quiet as usual, a little gloomy and absorbed in her work.

"I see aunt has conquered you altogether," she said, addressing the young man.

"Since I can be of service to her I can eat your bread with better appetite."

"It's Anthony's bread. You mustn't offend his memory."

"I beg your pardon. He, who knew me, wouldn't be offended. I am rough to everybody."

"It's too bad," she answered softly.

The doctor entered the dining-room.

"If we do not have the blizzard to-morrow, I am going to Shchedrynsk to buy some rye," said he.

They sat down to the table.

"May I ask you where Shyshkin, the owner of the distilleries, lives?" asked Mrozowiecki.

"In Kurhan when he is at home. Do you think seriously of trying to get some position?"

"I shall be only too glad if he takes me."

"Have you the necessary qualifications for such a position?"

The young man pulled out a large pocket-book and took from it some papers.

"Here is my diploma from the Institute of Technology, and here is a certificate from a factory in Warsaw."

"That's splendid. To-day at dinner you were so backward in answering that I thought we had to do with an amateur."

"I answered in the same way that Shumski questioned me. He likes to joke. Why should I spoil his pleasure."

Panna Marya looked at him this time much surprised. He was speaking seriously, as usual, and his face wore the same indifferent expression. She began to suspect that this air of indifference hid something quite different.

The doctor finished looking at the papers.

"They are splendid. And people with such qualifications must come here to work for a living."

"One must have good luck in everything, and until now I have never in my life had any luck."

"Tell us something about yourself, won't you?"

"It will not be very interesting to you."

"On the contrary."

"I will tell you then, if you like," he answered simply.

"If you will permit me," said old Utowich, "I will listen also. I am sure you will tell us something about my country."

They were all sitting at the dining-room table. The doctor played *solitaire* and the women sewed. Mrozowiecki replenished the fire, and began thus :

"Until I was nine years old I was very rich. My father had a large estate in Podlasie, Promieniew. We were only two children, myself and a sister a couple of years younger. I don't remember my mother. When I was nine years old we lost everything—father, wealth, even our good name. I didn't know about it then, but later on they told me that my father had debts, and that many people had lost money through him. The estate of Promieniew was purchased by Burski, my father's friend. We remained with him, my sister and I. He was a hard man—avaricious and misanthropical ; but he gave us that which the poor need—education, and hardening for the battle of life. The food was bad, the clothing rough, and at home we suffered from cold. We became accustomed to all kinds of hardship and misery, which were shared with us by his own daughter, his only

child, and heiress to a very large fortune. Burski was very wealthy indeed!

"Two years passed in this way, then he sent me to school. Even there I was obliged to be satisfied with the bare necessities of life, my board only was paid for. When I outgrew my clothes I did not dare ask for new; so, beginning with the third class, I acted as tutor, and with this, and some copying, I got along somehow.

"I almost always spent my vacations at Promieniew, with my sister, who, being with Panni Burski, did not complain. She had almost forgotten the hardships of her childhood.

"When I was in the fifth class, Burski refused to even pay for my board, owing to 'hard times,' he said. I don't know how it was with him, but it really went hard with me, and had it not been for the help of some good friends, I could never have finished at the Gymnasium. When, after two years of hard work, I brought him my diploma, he said nothing. He did not care for me one jot. He kept my sister because she worked for him; performing the work of a housekeeper without pay.

"I had no one to go to for advice, and there was no use in my returning there again, as people were ill-disposed toward me on account

of my father. After resting a couple of months I went to St. Petersburg. During that journey I met Anthony, and his acquaintance was a blessing to me."

Here Mrozowiecki stopped, fearing he had said too much. He glanced at his listeners. They shivered, but after a while, the doctor arose, approached the fire-place, and, seating himself near Mrozowiecki, said,

"Speak. Tell us everything."

"We became acquainted in the train. I lacked the money to continue my journey, and was in such despair that I determined to beg for it. I approached him, but I could not beg, and I began to cry. He did not ask me any questions, but said,

"'You great baby. If you cry like that about some miserable money, how you would cry after your sweetheart. Don't bother yourself. I have enough for us both. Stick to me and you will be all right.'

"Since that time he looked after me like a father, and as long as I live there will be no moment in my life that I shall not bless him."

Here he began to weep.

The doctor took his head in both hands, and pressed it to his breast.

Now Panna Marya understood why her brother

loved this modest man. It was for his simple soul; for his sentiment; for his faithfulness and gratitude.

In the meantime the young man overcame his emotion, and continued,

"We used to live together, and he paid for me for two years. Then I got a scholarship. The last year I was so well off that I was able to save a hundred roubles, and wanted to pay him back. That was the only time he got angry with me.

"‘You are a blind man,’ said he. ‘Don’t you see how many comrades there are in misery, you donkey, and you bring me their money? Get out! Get out immediately! Don’t you know that Zatorski is sick in bed, and that Mirecki has dinner only once in three days? Go there, you idiot!’

"After that day I knew where to pay the money he had helped me along with.

"He finished his studies, and practised medicine in Warsaw. I got my diploma and joined him. We loved each other so much that we could not live separated. I found a situation with a salary of over a thousand roubles. But such good fortune, coming after long years of misery, turned my head, and I began to live fast. Anthony noticed it; he scolded me; he advised

me ; but, seeing that I took no notice of it, he said,

“‘Listen. You have a position. Marry as soon as you can. Otherwise you will become a good-for-nothing.’

“When he said that I remembered Sophie Burski, and I determined to see her at once. I went to Promieniew. There I found everything as I had left it. The house half in ruins, and the old man more avaricious than ever. Sophie had grown to be a quiet, timid young woman. Just the right one for me. I told my plans to Walka, my sister ; but she looked at me, and said,

“‘No use!’

“‘Why?’ asked I.

“‘Because her father would not give her you, and then, you cannot marry the daughter of the man who murdered your father.’

“I looked at her in astonishment, and she continued,

“‘I learned it not long since, and I wished to write to you about it, but I pitied Sophie. Do you remember if our father had a coachman named Thomas?’

“‘Yes, he had.’

“‘Well, that coachman saw our father, while he was very ill, give Burski the money with

which to pay his debts. At that time he inherited Aunt Wistycki's estate. Burski took the money, told the creditors that father was bankrupt, and purchased all claims himself for half their value. He thought father would soon die, and kept everything secret. By accident one of the creditors succeeded in seeing father, and he disclosed Burski's shameful acts. Then father, though in a dying condition, went to the city, and, after learning the truth there, died in the hotel from a stroke of apoplexy.

“‘On hearing this I almost went crazy,’ Walka continued. ‘You have forgotten everything while at your studies. I, living here, forlorn and miserable, through Burski's misdeeds, heard all that people said. I carefully gathered their reminiscences of father. I gathered and preserved our injuries in my heart to tell them you when you had become a man. You must vindicate father's name, and crush this man who has been the cause of all our misery. I have known this for a long time, but I did not wish to disturb your studies, so I suffered and waited alone.’

“‘Where is this coachman?’ asked I.

“‘He is dead. He took five hundred roubles for his silence, and he was silent until his last moment. When he was dying he sent for me,

not wishing to go to the grave with this sin on his mind.'

"'All this is false,' I cried. 'Uncle Wistycki was then Marshal of Nobility. He would have defended us.'

"'He would have done it, if Burski, acting under power of attorney for father, had not given him a full receipt for aunt's whole estate, though he only received half of it. Uncle Wistycki was afraid that he would have to take care of us; that we should become a burden on him; and he forced Burski, by his power as Marshal of Nobility, to bring us up. This he did, but we didn't cost him much.'

"'But give me some proofs,' I cried. 'A dead man is no witness.'

"'There is another witness who is still alive—Dr. Drozdowski, who attended father.'

"'Where is he?'

"'That no one knows. He is lost, and we can find no trace of him. If we could only find him!'

"'We can bring our case to the court of the last judgment,' I answered sadly. 'Poor Sophie!'

"'Not so poor as you think. Young Wistycki wishes to marry her. They are near bankruptcy, and Burski cannot find a husband for his

daughter. You must give up all idea of marrying her. Let mud stick to mud.'

"I gave up, full of bitterness. I regretted Sophie, and I hated Burski more than ever. I am not inclined to be revengeful, but in this case I should have liked to crush him. I went to see him, and told him that I was going to take my sister away with me. He demurred at this, because she worked for him for nothing. Then I said to him,

"'You have taken from us our father's good name, our wealth and social position. The girl has paid with hard work for the bread you have given her. I have made a position for myself, and will now take care of her. I will leave you alone, and God shall judge you!'

"He sprang at me like a wild beast, but I threw him off and left him. I took Walka with me, and went back to Warsaw with her, instead of a wife.

"With that, my misfortunes began again. They were obliged to economise in the factory, and I lost my position, and soon after Anthony went away. I went from factory to factory searching for work, while my sister earned money by sewing. In that way a year and six months passed, and the misery we endured during that time used up all our reserve stock of strength

and faith. At the moment when everything was darkest, Burski offered to help us, but we could not accept. We hated him so, that we felt we would rather die than accept anything from him.

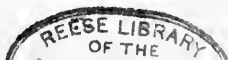
"Finally, I found work and saved some money—Anthony called me here. After consulting Walka, I determined to try my luck in Siberia, and Walka had an idea that beyond the Ural I should find the missing witness—Dr. Drozdowski. In the autumn, having saved five hundred roubles, I went away, leaving my sister with my fiancée. Both girls had good positions in a store. But it seems that my ill-luck has followed me, for you know the condition in which Panna Marya found me on the steppe. That's all."

Mrozowiecki became silent. The doctor and his daughter were also silent for a while, in deep thought. Only Ksiondz Ubysh, who during the whole time had been building card houses, said complainingly,

"You build—you build—and that which you build falls down!"

Old Utowich, folding her busy hands on her lap, said,

"When you left the country, was the grass still green and were the trees covered with leaves?"



"The grass was green in the fields, and the trees had lost half their leaves, which had turned red and yellow!"

"My Lord! My Lord! For twenty years I have not seen our autumn. Oh, the climate here! In the spring they sow quickly and gather quickly, for the cold begins in September and lasts until May! And where are the trees? Elms, oaks! Here there are only birches and pine trees. Anthony brought us a branch of lilac, we planted it on the south side of the house, and every winter we cover it with manure, but it seems to me that it does not smell as it does in our country. Have you not brought any souvenir?"

"I had some seeds and dried flowers, but the thieves in Tobolsk stole everything. I have only a medallion with the Holy Virgin from Ostra Brama."

"Oh, I have a similar one, and the family also has one. We prize them highly!"

The doctor and his daughter exchanged glances. They understood each other without a word being spoken. The girl nodded, then the doctor stretched out his hand and laid it on Mrozowiecki's head.

"On this penitential road, God has taken from me the hope and aim of my life—my

son," said the doctor solemnly. "Perhaps in pity, He then sent me you. Remain with us as a brother and a countryman. Will you?"

"No need to ask me. I will give my best in your service," said Mrozowiecki with emotion.

"Very well. Now, I would ask you a favour—you must excuse an old man—I shall call you Anthony!" whispered the doctor with quivering lips.

Mrozowiecki said nothing, but pressed the doctor's hand. Then he rose and approached Panna Marya timidly.

"Thank you!" whispered he.

She raised her eyes, and silently held out her hand with dignity. He knew, from the pressure of her hand, that her father's action did not please her, and he felt humiliated, thinking he had appeared to take advantage of the old man's emotion, and had too easily agreed to play a part, which by right, belonged to Shumski. At once all his joy was quenched, and all warmth disappeared. Again he felt a stranger to them—more than a stranger, an intruder and a foe, notwithstanding that his will was of the best.

He retreated and knew not what to say, when Ksiondz Ubysh began talking about his card houses.

"That they fall when I build them badly I

can understand, but they also fall when I build them well! Why? I will not build any more."

At that moment the dogs began to howl in the courtyard and old Utowich jumped in her chair.

"I am sure Siergey is coming back. What a dreadful drunkard. Now he will be sick again for three days."

The doctor rose and said,

"Someone must go and see what is the matter." He looked at Mrozowiecki and added,

"Will you go and take the drunkard to his room?"

Mrozowiecki went downstairs.

In the courtyard Siergey was lying drunk in the snow, with the dogs jumping on him and biting him joyfully. He was talking to them.

"Um-m-m um ko! Um-m Major! Lie down you Sibiraks! You wish for some cutlets? Hein?"

He tried to rise. Mrozowiecki took him to the kitchen, where the warmth soon caused him to become motionless and stiff.

"I am sick," he said, and fell asleep.

The young man went to his room. All the other inmates of the house had retired. The wanderer sat down on the bed of his dead friend, and began to think. Now he regretted

having accepted the doctor's proposition. He was downcast and sorrowful. The women were against him; he would be obliged to meet Shumski frequently, and the situation was bound to be unpleasant. Why did he agree? Would it not be better to go blindly forward in his struggle for bread, than to remain here? He was tempted to go at once, and then, after obtaining employment, return and explain. But he was ashamed of such thoughts. Raising his eyes, he saw a photograph of his friend, who seemed to look reproachfully at him. That look comforted him, and he sighed deeply.

"I can't refuse his father!" he whispered. "Let come what will, I will close my lips and suffer."

He did not sleep much that night. He washed his only shirt for the coming Sunday, and then brushed and mended his clothes as best he could. If these would only last for some time—at least until the summer—he could sell his sheepskin coat, and then . . . Well, during his whole life he had not had an answer for this "then," and still he lived.

The next day, the whole European colony gathered in the doctor's room, and he became acquainted with his countrymen. There were ten of them: old people, nearing their life's

end; young ones, brought up here—or newcomers. The majority, especially the elderly ones, expressed in their looks and voices dull resignation and quietude. The others looked fearless; they were noisy and wild—typical aborigines. All were poor. Some were small tradesmen, others were clerks in stores. The elders lived on a few roubles sent them monthly by their relatives. As it was Sunday, they were dressed decently, and every one who entered asked the same question,

“How is the Ksiondz to-day?”

“Very well!” answered old Utowich from the kitchen, where, in place of “sick” Sergey, she was obliged to prepare the dinner.

That day Ksiondz Ubysh was remarkably solemn and clear-minded. From early morning he trotted about the house, reciting his Latin prayers, changed the ribbons in a worn-out missal, and did not speak to anyone. The visitors spoke in low voices, greeted the host, gathered in the dining-room, and looked at the closed doors of the doctor’s office.

“Thank God, we shall have mass!” they whispered in relief.

Every Sunday they came in uncertainty—Ksiondz Ubysh had fits of melancholy, and sometimes strange fancies took possession of

him ; at such times he did not wish to read the mass, and they prayed without him, because the priest did not leave his room. They had not had mass for three weeks, but to-day the priest was especially kind.

After they had waited patiently, he appeared in a room of the doctor's office. Behind him was a temporary altar, and on it the image of the Holy Virgin of Czenstochowa.

"Do you desire confession?" he asked distinctly.

Some old men followed him into the improvised chapel, and Panna Marya entered the dining-room and asked for Mr. Rogowski.

"He didn't come. Shyshkin sent him to Shchedrynsk."

"Is there anybody among you who could replace him?"

"Nobody remembers the words of the prayers," some youngster replied.

"Could you serve the priest?" she asked Mrozowiecki.

"Go, Anthony!" the doctor said.

Only now the whole colony noticed him, for, as usual, he stood aside.

"Who is he?" they asked the doctor.

"My son's friend," he answered abruptly.

There was no time to ask more, for at that

moment the bell rang and they all went into the chapel.

They drew old books from their pockets. They listened to the mass, kneeling and praying so loud that often their voices drowned the Latin words of the ritual. Ksiondz Ubysh was quite changed. He was solemn and dignified, with fire in his usually vague eyes, and his movements full of unction.

From the kitchen old Utowich rushed in, and kneeling down, said,

"Oh, Lord, give him eternal rest."

This she repeated again and again.

Evidently there were many souls for whom she prayed eternal rest.

At the end the priest began a hymn, "*Sub tuum presidium!*" (Under thy tutelage.)

Everybody closed their books; looking at the holy picture, they sang this by heart, and their faces—wild and degraded by misery, or sharpened by illness—were lit up and ennobled with enthusiasm. The priest rose, took off his church robes, and, coming back to everyday life, almost ran to the kitchen for his coffee. After he left, one by one, they went into the dining-room. At first they were dignified, then the youngsters began to talk aloud about the coming yarmark, and soon a general shouting filled the room.

Mrozowiecki noticed that, contrary to the duty of a host, the doctor did not mingle in the conversation. He sat at the table and looked thoughtfully at his guests. Finally, he called Mrozowiecki, and said softly,

"Be kind enough to leave the room for a while. You may listen if you like, but I must respect their sensitiveness. You understand—don't you?"

When he had left the room, the old man asked his guests,

"Why is Rogowski absent?"

A big fellow named Lukowski laughed.

"Well, you scolded him last Sunday, and he swore he would never come here again."

"Was I not right?"

"Certainly, you were right," answered Lukowski, "but everyone has his own pride."

"His pride ought to make him act rightly. And if you acknowledge that I am right, why then do you act in the same way as he? Instead of working, you all gamble, and lose your money, and when your money is gone you cheat Shyshkin."

"We are not thieves," grumbled Lukowski.

"He who walks in a marsh should know that he can sink very deep in the mire, and he should retreat as soon as he soils his shoes. Until now,

everybody here respected us. We should cherish this good opinion. By your misdeeds, you are not only injuring yourselves personally, but you are bringing your nationality into bad repute, and we command you to respect your nationality—we, who are all of the same blood. If you are an upright and intelligent man, you will understand me and act accordingly. Here we must keep guard over ourselves, because we have no source from which to draw moral refreshment. Tell Rogowski to come back to his countrymen."

Lukowski, ashamed of himself, was silent, and the doctor turned to another young man, who was dressed as a peasant.

"And you, Rudnicki—is what they say true, that you are going to marry the daughter of the peasant Iliya, from Nagorna?"

"I was only joking," explained Rudnicki.

"If it was a joke, it was a stupid one, and if you were thinking of marrying a peasant's daughter, I call it a shame!"

"One becomes almost crazy from loneliness," grumbled Rudnicki.

An old man, with a thin, sickly face, said,

"Tobol flows not far from your home. Drown yourself if loneliness eats you up."

"Be easy, Walenty!" the doctor said to him.

"Rudnicki, when you are lonely, come and see us in the evening. I have some books, and now you will find a young companion. Come, I pray you. You will always be welcome."

Rudnicki, embarrassed, began to pull his knuckles—then he laughed idiotically, and said,

"But I should like to marry."

At this all burst into laughter, and an old man said,

"Why don't you come to see me then?"

"Will you give me your daughter?"

"Why not? I did not bring her up for myself, but for some one of you fellows."

"Why not for me!" "Or for me!" "Or for me!" several shouted at once.

"I am the first," cried Rudnicki.

Evidently the doctor had nothing more to say, for he did not stop the noise, but began to talk with Walenty, and then old Utowich entered and commenced to lay the table. The host called Mrozowiecki and introduced him to the countrymen. After a short time they treated him cordially, in their rough fashion, like an old acquaintance. They asked him about the far East, about the trees and water, and about people long since dead. The old men had not forgotten politics, and with Marcinkowski, the father of the much-desired girl, Mrozowiecki

divided Europe seven times, each time more fantastically than the last.

They ate their dinner with the appetites of wolves, and then began to leave the house.

When the door closed on the last one, the doctor put his hand on the young man's shoulder and said,

"See how difficult it is to plant a branch cut from the trunk—how difficult it is to preserve it green. And all of them have the same thought—Go back! go back! and to where they were worse off."

"Don't you care to go back?" timidly asked the young man.

"I must stay here. Don't you see how many years they have known this house: Where would they go on Sunday? To the dram-shop. No, I must remain here."

As he spoke thus his eyes, full of quiet resignation, were fixed on the window-pane, covered with snow.

And Mrozowiecki assented softly,

"Yes, you must remain here."

CHAPTER III.

EARLY in the morning the doctor awakened Mrozowiecki.

"We will go out on the steppe," said he.

The young man, not being accustomed to make any remarks, dressed himself quickly and glanced at the thermometer, which registered only twenty degrees.

"Remarkably mild winter," said Doctor Gostynski, during breakfast. "We have quite a way to go—about fifty versts. Marya will take Grynja and the horses, and we will go with Andryanek. I wonder he is not here yet."

At that moment a man of gigantic stature appeared in the doorway. He took off his cap, crossed himself, made several bows before a holy image, and after familiarly greeting those present, sat down at the table.

"For the first time you see Antoni Stefanovich," said the doctor.

"Yes. Father told me you had a countryman

with you, but I didn't have time to come and make his acquaintance before. I like him and maybe we will become friends if he is smart and a huntsman. Have you a rifle?"

"No."

"Buy one then. I will let you have powder and ball. In our country there is plenty to do in winter, as well as in summer—partridges, ducks, bielaks, galanduks. Now there is plenty of fish. Come and see us, that we may become better acquainted. We were friends with the dead man."

"I will send him to you when we have more time. Now, before yarmark we are very busy," said the doctor.

"Of course. Well, I have swallowed my tea. Let us be going."

"Do you think we shall find Kirghizes near the lake?"

"And where should this vermin be? There are about twenty yurts during the winter."

"Then let us go, in God's name."

"One minute," said Andryanek, glancing at Mrozowiecki. "He must not go with us in that state. His pims (felt boots) are worn out, and his tulub (sheepskin jacket) is too light. You must dress warmer, otherwise we shall have trouble with you on the steppe."

"I am all right," said Mrozowiecki, colouring hotly at this reference to his poor clothing.

But the peasant laughed.

"Don't blush like a girl! If you haven't another tulub, take mine. I took along three of them. Don't worry about being poor—you will be rich some day."

At this speech, Mrozowiecki wished that the ground would open and swallow him. The doctor and Panna Marya looked at him.

"I should have thought of it!" exclaimed the old man. "Wait! Wait! Marya, give me the key of the trunk."

"I will fetch what is necessary," answered the girl, in her usual imperturbable, tranquil manner.

She brought a new tulub and felt boots, and it seemed to Mrozowiecki that she mentally made note of the value of the articles as she handed them to him. He dressed without a word, while the doctor grumbled,

"Must I take care of you like a child? Such stupid pride and independence!"

They finally found themselves seated in Andryanek's sleigh, and started off like the wind.

"Where are we going?" asked Mrozowiecki.

"To the Kirghizes, to buy some oxen of them. Listen, in three weeks there is a big yarmark in Kurhan. I shall kill all the oxen I have had

fattened in the distilleries, and put new ones in their places. I shall buy them to-day, and you will take them home. I shall be busy with grain."

They drove on over the clean, bare steppe, the peasant whistling joyfully.

"How do the Kirghizes keep their cattle during the winter?"

"They pasture them."

"On the snow?"

"Yes—you shall see. Look, here a herd has already passed. We are near yurts."

In fact, the snow was trampled, and beneath could be seen the stems of last year's herbs.

"Here the horses passed," remarked Andryanek.

"The horses go ahead," explained the doctor, 'then come the cattle, and what remains is eaten by the sheep."

"And they do not give them anything else to eat?"

"No. The Kirghiz prefers to lose all his cattle rather than work. The weaker ones die during the winter, but the stronger, and the majority of them, survive."

"Here are your oxen!" exclaimed Andryanek.

A tabun (herd of horses) was feeding on the bare steppe. The cattle were not large, but they were broad, and so thin that every bone

could be counted. They were grazing on the stems, bushes, and blackened remnants of the herbs. Behind the herd a few Kirghizes sat motionless on their small horses. The doctor inspected the oxen, and called to the herdsmen, showing them a piece of silver money.

They came at once and began to mumble and point behind them, to where, on the far horizon, some smoke was visible.

"Whose are these oxen?" asked the doctor.

They pointed out different herds of cattle, saying,

"This belongs to Beygabul-Buka; that one to Schynzdey-Kyesdeyeff."

"I know both of them. Let us be going."

They went in the direction in which the smoke was seen. It became more and more distinct, but nothing else indicated a human habitation there. Around the sweet water lake, the wind had heaped the snow on herbs and weeds, the evaporation of this snow was what had looked like smoke from afar. They approached the yurts, and around one of them Mrozowiecki perceived piles of blackened bones of the cattle who had perished—the trophy of the winter. Among these skeletons, which were more or less bare of meat, some living beings were moving. They were the children of the Kirghizes, cutting

with their knives the remainder of the frozen meat and eating it voraciously. As soon as they noticed the strangers, they hid in the interior of the pile.

The yurts were all round. Thick felt constituted the interior walls, while the exterior was of snow. The smoke escaped by a single opening, which served also as a door, and was covered by a piece of felt. The doctor, being familiar with their customs, entered the first yurt, followed by Mrozowiecki. Andryanek took care of the horses. Thick darkness and frightfully vitiated air were the first things that impressed one on entering the yurt, and the stench was so strong that Antoni staggered and wished to retreat. But hearing the doctor's voice, he mechanically repeated after him the words of greeting, and began to look around. Little by little his eyes became accustomed to the darkness and he could distinguish different objects in the room. He was standing as though in a box, narrower at the top, and with dark sides. Under his feet was a felt carpet, and in front of him a fire built of dried manure, over which was suspended a large iron pot, filled with koumiss. Near the walls, on a pile of felt, was a human figure, and two others could be seen sitting near the fire, looking curiously at the new-comers.

The doctor opened the conversation, having first seated himself.

"I greet you, Beygabul-Buka."

"Be healthy," answered one of the seated figures, without moving.

He was the owner of the yurta—an elderly man, feeble and yellow, wearing a round black cap on his clean-shaven head, and dressed in a long sarafan. Having greeted them, he mumbled something in his own language, and immediately those seated at the fire handed the doctor and Mrozowiecki glasses of the dreadful-smelling koumiss. Probably they were Beygabul-Buka's wives. Then they approached the young man and began to mumble, making many gestures. Of this mumbling, he could understand only one word, "bread." He put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a large piece of cake which old Utowich had given him for his luncheon. This he gave them, and they pulled it from his hands, divided it, and devoured it in the twinkling of an eye. Becoming bolder they began to examine him—to touch his clothes and express astonishment and wonder.

In the meantime, the doctor explained his business, and the bargaining began. They did not use many words. The doctor put before him the Chinese balls used for counting, and he

indicated with these his price. The Kirghiz thought, looked, and added two balls, which the doctor rejected after a while. In that way they repeated the same movement like two automatons.

Finally the Kirghiz began to eagerly praise his own oxen.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and said,

"They are not oxen; they are skins!" and he again rejected the balls.

Then he treated the Kirghiz to tobacco, and as they smoked their pipes only the sound of the wooden balls was heard. In that way they busied themselves for about an hour. Two Kirghizes entered the yurta, and the women began to take the skin off a dead sheep. The scene grew animated, and from beneath the pile of felts the heads of children began to appear. The new-comers also were served with koumiss. The doctor pulled a bottle of whiskey from his bag.

Mrozowiecki approached him and looked at the balls. The difference was now one rouble.

"Then this scarecrow is rich," he said softly.

"Every year I purchase from him two hundred oxen. He has horses and sheep in the same proportion."

"How many are you buying now?"

"Sixty, at six roubles each."

"Are they honest?"

"They are thieves, and are cheated a hundred times themselves by others."

Beygabul-Buka mumbled for a few minutes with his neighbours, and finally divided the difference in two. He was in great haste to get a drink. The doctor first wrote an agreement, having in his bag everything necessary for writing, and a candle, which, in the bad air of the yurta, burned very badly, and gave barely enough light to distinguish the clumsy letters in which Beygabul-Buka signed his name to the agreement. This was witnessed by Mrozowiecki and the Kirghiz Schynyney. Only after this was accomplished, did they drink the whiskey. The purchasers then left the foul air of the yurta, to breathe the fresh air of the steppe. The doctor laughed at Mrozowiecki's disgusted mien, and Andryanek swore at those "dirty and stinking creatures."

"Every country has its customs," said the old man. "In Europe the hard, dirty work is done by the poor, miserable employés. Here everybody is equal. The same hands which count their own thousands, skin a sheep and measure grease at the yarmark. Nobody wonders or jokes at seeing a rich man taking care of his

own herds, and nobody envies him his money. His farmhand sits at the same table with him, and he cannot understand that he might be the inferior in any respect to his master.

“‘My master is rich,’ says he. ‘Well, I can become richer if I have good luck.’ In Europe, my clerk would not pay a visit to Beygabul, and here, when I have need of him, I visit him myself. Here, one must gather with one’s own hands the kopeks as well as the roubles. Only in that way can one make a fortune here, for here life is still primitive, the people are simple, and Nature is in a virgin state.”

They entered the sleigh and started homeward.

“To-morrow we will divide the work,” continued the doctor. “I will go to Shchedrynsk to purchase grain, and you will go round to the distilleries and look up my oxen.”

The young man, after a moment of silence, said with hesitation,

“Would it not be better for me to go and buy the grain?”

“Why?”

“Perhaps Shumski will not like me to inspect.”

“What do you care about Shumski? You are doing your duty, and you mustn’t care about anything or anybody.”

"As you say."

It was evening when they returned home. The doctor was called away directly to a sick man. Mrozowiecki was received by the women. It seemed to him that Panna Marya looked at his clothing inquisitively. He undressed immediately, placing the borrowed clothes in the dining-room.

Marya noticed this—she looked into his eyes and her glance became gloomy. She rose, and without saying a word, put the clothing away. That evening she did not speak to him. From indifferent they were fast becoming foes. Conversation with old Utowich was not very animated, and the young man soon retired to his room. He did not see how he was to continue living here under such conditions.

The next day he went to see the local authorities, and showed them his passport. The official, after reading it, began to laugh.

"Do you know," he said to the peasants who were present in his office, "we shall have a nobleman in our powiat (county). Here he is."

All began to laugh, and the young man said indignantly,

"Why do you laugh? I am not the only one here. Doctor Gostynski, Rudnicki, and Lukowski are also noblemen."

"You are mistaken! They lost their nobility beyond the Ural. You are the only nobleman!"

"There is another?" someone said.

"Who?"

"Farafantoff."

"Has any one of you seen him?"

"Nobody; but all laugh at him."

Finally, Mrozowiecki himself began to laugh at this democratic country—he laughed at this Siberian peculiarity particularly, shook hands with Andryanek's father, his official superior, and went out of the office of the gmina (community).

Lebiaza, although only a village, had the appearance of a town. The two-storey houses, ornamented with carvings, well-made fences, numerous stores, the population more commercial than agricultural, a magnificent cerkoff (church), and a large bar—such was the general aspect of the streets. Behind the village, the Tobol, covered with ice, lay among the pine trees, and beyond the river another village, Nagorna, was seen. Beyond again was the endless white steppe.

Antoni mounted a hill and looked about him for a long time. All around was the dead desert, and the annihilation of Nature; it seemed impossible that any power could give her life. The poor man sighed deeply. He understood

the great desire of the others to escape from this dreadful country. He lost all courage and turned toward home apathetically.

The doctor was ready for the journey, and there was a span of horses ready for Mrozowiecki. The old man gave him the necessary instructions and a letter to Shyshkin, authorising him to make the inspection of his oxen, and then he set off to purchase the grain.

It was the first time Mrozowiecki went on business for his employer, and he lost his way. The doctor came back with the grain, sent it to the whiskey distilleries, and was surprised at not finding Antoni at home. Shumski had not shown up for a couple of weeks. Panna Marya betrayed neither surprise nor sorrow at the prolonged absence of her fiancé. She shrugged her shoulders when her father mentioned it.

"He will be back," she answered indifferently.

"I see you don't care much about him," old Utowich said indignantly.

"I care as much as he does—about my money," and she laughed ironically.

"Why did you accept him then?" grumbled her father.

"All men are alike."

"What a heart you have. The Lord preserve everyone from it," said Utowich.

"I don't offer it to anyone," the young girl answered sharply.

"Let her be," interrupted the doctor, "she is right. The one who has no heart will be happy, and people will not trample on him. If she is cold we can't help it! But where is Mrozowiecki?"

"Did you give him any money?"

"Do you suspect him already? Anthony's friend a thief?" said the old man angrily.

The girl frowned.

"Not at all. He may be honest. I was thinking of robbery. Then again he might have been taken sick. He has not good enough clothing for such cold weather."

"You gave him a tulub."

"He didn't accept it. I did not offer it him a second time."

"Rather than have your heart troubled, you would see him frozen."

"I am glad you are of the same opinion as I," exclaimed Utowich triumphantly. "She has no heart."

Even Ksiondz Ubysh looked at the girl, who leaned over the table and went on with her sewing in silence.

"Though I speak with the tongue of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding

brass, or a tinkling cymbal," quoted he, in his dead voice.

The doctor was silent awhile, then left the room. As he closed the door, he said to Utowich,

"Aunt, put that coat in his room. I will speak to him."

The old woman trotted away to fulfil the order. The priest went to the kitchen, from which he had caught the smell of freshly-baked bread. The girl sat sewing. After a moment the tears began to drop on the linen, and she laid aside her work.

From the street came the sound of sleigh bells. She shuddered, rose, and escaped from the room. When Shumski appeared there was no one in the room. He began to hum. The doctor came down to see him.

"You have forgotten us."

"Not at all. I was deucedly busy."

"Have you seen Mrozowiecki?"

"Who is he?"

"Well, my new employé."

"That jackass? No, I haven't seen him."

"I sent him to look at the oxen. And where do you come from?"

"From Kurhan. Shyshkin kept me there the whole week. We took an inventory."

"I can't understand what has become of the boy."

"Perhaps the Kirghizes have robbed him."

"Don't joke. I am seriously anxious about him."

Shumski yawned. He looked tired, and his eyes were red. He rose when Panna Marya entered, but his animation was artificial. His fiancée glanced at him inquisitively, and did not throw off her gloomy air. Only Utowich laughed at her favourite's jokes.

They had finished supper, and were seated round the fire talking, when the door opened, and Mrozowiecki entered. He came in so softly that they did not hear him at once. He was white with cold, and, instead of speaking, he only moved his lips. Without taking off his overcoat he sat down near the fire.

Panna Marya rose and approached him.

"Drink," said she, handing him a glass of vodka. "You are frozen to death. Drink quickly."

He swallowed the whiskey.

"Judging from your physique you ought to resist the cold better," exclaimed Shumski. "To-day was not very cold. I did not feel it. It is true I am as strong as iron. Panna Marya, why give yourself so much trouble? This man is not an invalid; he can help himself. Even

if I were dying I would not permit a woman to give herself so much trouble for me."

Mrozowiecki looked at him in silence.

"Very intelligent subject," muttered Shumski.

"Let him alone; he is cold; he is hardly alive. The one who is to blame for it must serve now."

Saying this, the doctor looked at his daughter, who was cutting bread. She became very pale; the knife slipped and touched her hand, drawing blood. The blood dropped on the piece of bread destined for the new-comer, and Utowich shouted,

"Oh, Lord! The blood on the bread! It's fatal!"

Shumski rushed to get some water, the doctor for some medicine, and Utowich for some linen.

Mrozowiecki looked pitifully with his straight-forward glance at the girl.

"You must excuse me," he exclaimed. "I did not come here to take somebody else's bread. I hope I shall not bother you much longer. I see how you hate me."

She tied her handkerchief round her hand, and looked at him sharply.

"It is proved that I hate everybody," she muttered.

They gathered round her and bandaged her hand, forgetting all about Mrozowiecki.

He was already warmer, and felt as though coming back to life. All at once he said to the doctor,

"Where do you wish me to put the skins? I brought them with me."

"What skins?"

"The skins of the oxen. I have ten of them, and four are lost, for the dogs tore the bulls."

"What bulls? What are you talking about?"

"I am talking about the oxen you told me to look after. They were not taken care of, and the manure stood up to their knees. Fourteen of them dropped dead, and I brought the skins," said Mrozowiecki.

"What an agreeable messenger you are," laughed Shumski.

"It was not my duty to take care of them. I am sorry I found them so," answered Mrozowiecki tranquilly.

"I see you have everything in good order," said the doctor sarcastically.

"I told you I had been absent for a week. Without me everything goes wrong. I will teach them a lesson!" returned Shumski.

"You have taught me one already. Fourteen oxen! But you, where have you been all the week?" the doctor asked, turning to Mrozowiecki.

"You must excuse me, but Shyshkin detained me in Utyacka."

"What? Shumski tells me that he was with him for a whole week in Kurhan."

"I don't know where Pan Shumski was, but I know that when I came to Utyacka Shyshkin was in a great deal of trouble. One of his pumps was damaged, and he asked me to repair it for him. This took me two days. He told me that when he sees you again, he will apologize for my absence."

"Well, well! I see you have gained his goodwill without my protection. I congratulate you on your smartness."

"I did not use much. I was glad to help him in his trouble."

"I suppose he paid you well for your work? The old man, when drunk, is very liberal."

"He was sober when I was there."

"Then he was not liberal. Do they appreciate your abilities better in Europe?"

Mrozowiecki shook his shoulders, and did not answer. He could relate many bits of news gathered on his journey, but he preferred to keep silent.

The doctor was gloomy, and sat pulling his beard. Shumski was evidently seeking a quarrel. The patient lad rose and went to his room.

Only when there did he open his tulub, and take from his pocket several bank-notes. He counted them twice. He had twenty roubles—quite a sum to him in his present state of poverty. Various plans rushed through his head. Although very tired, he could not sleep. His first thought was to go home with this small amount of money, and see his fiancée, his sister, and his country. But fear and shame stopped him. Then he thought of buying some clothing, but he regretted parting with the money come by so unexpectedly. The clothing would wear out, and what would he have afterwards? Then half asleep, fancy played with splendid business affairs, and he fell asleep dreaming of his estate at Promieniew, which he had succeeded in getting back from the hands of the man who had robbed him.

When he rose next day, he hid his money and went out. He entered the store and purchased some underclothing and a shirt. He wished to buy some tobacco, but decided not to spend the money, and resisted this temptation. Then, walking down the street, his thoughts were busy with plans for commencing some business.

“I wish you good health,” said someone behind him.

He turned and beheld Andryanek smiling at him.

"Come and see us. This is a holiday. We can then become better acquainted while drinking tea together.

The whole family received the stranger with rough, primitive cordiality. They feasted him on tea and vodka, cedar nuts and cake. They asked him about his country; about his family, his wife, and business. But they did not envy him for having seen the marvels of civilisation.

Andryanek even laughed at them.

"A long summer is dangerous, because all kinds of diseases come from the heat. The winter is healthy, and the cold kills the weak children. But those who survive, they are strong, like I am," and he stretched his gigantic body.

"What a country!" added his brother, with pride.

"Can one become rich?" asked Mrozowiecki.

"Certainly. Have you already started?" asked Andryanek.

"I am employed by the doctor."

"That does not matter. You can go into business just the same. How much money have you?"

"Almost nothing—twenty roubles."

"It's enough for a beginning. Will you go into partnership with me?"

"How?"

"We will hire nets and try our good luck before the yarmark."

"Where?"

"In the Tobol. He who has a net has fish, if he has good luck, and the work is healthy. Will you do it with me?"

"I will tell you to-morrow. I must first ask my employer."

"All right. When one has no father his employer must act as his head. Come to-morrow with an axe."

Mrozowiecki liked the project; he also liked this great, jolly giant, whose eyes shone when there was talk of hunting, and hard work with risk attached to it. Andryanek was a healthy and simple-minded representative of a young nation.

Almost decided to go into partnership with his new friend, Mrozowiecki went home to get his breakfast, which he ate in the kitchen, not wishing to meet Shumski. The cook's cat was his sole companion. Then he went in to see the doctor. The betrothed couple were talking in the dining-room. With great hesitation he thanked the doctor for his hospitality.

"What, do you wish to leave us?" asked the old man in astonishment.

"I am an intruder here. No matter how I work, it will always be bad. If I tell the truth, they will call me an intriguer, and if I am silent, then I feel I am not conscientious. It will be better that I go before I disturb your peace."

"This is too quick," said the doctor bitterly. "I thought you would replace my son. I was mistaken."

"No, sir, you were not mistaken; but you already have someone to replace your son."

"Ah, it is true," said the doctor. "My test does not amount to much here. I must capitulate. I have no right to stop you from going. I am sure Shyshkin offered you some position. He is right, and you are right. Here nobody thought to even protect you from the cold. Therefore it is right that you leave me."

He spoke rapidly, as though he would like to finish as soon as possible.

"Have you already a position?"

"No, sir."

"Where are you going then?"

"I don't need very much. I will find something."

"Listen! Stay at least until to-morrow. Think it over. Don't act rashly."

"I will stay, but I shall not change my mind," whispered Mrozowiecki.

"Well, do as you please. I was mistaken in you."

The young man left the room sad at heart. He felt that he had acted rightly in the matter, yet he was ashamed. It was a pity he could not explain his action to the doctor. The old man was angry. Why? Because Mrozowiecki was discreet.

Utowich sent him to the store. He was glad of this. In the evening they brought him a letter. He trembled, thinking it might be bad news from home. But it was only a proposition from Shyshkin to take charge of the distillery. And Shumski? He was much astonished.

He was still standing with the letter in his hand, hardly believing his own eyes, when Shumski rushed in. He had also a paper, which he threw on the table.

"You made that charge!" shouted he, white with rage.

Mrozowiecki took the letter and read it. It contained Shumski's discharge.

"About what charge are you talking?" asked he quietly.

"Don't pretend not to understand. You told him that I gambled in Kurhan."

"Shyshkin told me that a rascal and a thief were drinking in Kurhan, and that he would chase both of them back. He was then drunk, and free with his epithets. I did not know you were connected with the matter. And I care about it no more than about last winter's snow: I am not going to take your position, so you have no right to talk to me in that way."

"Why don't you take the position? You hold in your hand Shyshkin's letter, in which he asks you to come."

"The position is not for me. I can't drink vodka and gamble. Don't look round. No one is listening to us. To-morrow morning I shall leave this house, for I do not wish to be guilty of staying here, and keeping anything from them. Shyshkin's anger will pass, he will take you back, and you will be on a surer footing here. Only don't offend me again, because I can also be out of patience."

Shumski turned on his heel and left the room.

Mrozowiecki ate his last supper alone in the kitchen. He was on bad terms with the doctor, and with Shumski. He said good-bye to Utowich, gave Siergey a few kopeks, and complimented him on his cat. He did not wish to see anything more of Panna Marya, and decided to depart without taking leave of her.

It was still dark when he rose, made a bundle of his few belongings, and went out. He stopped in the courtyard and took off his cap, having seen Panna Marya coming from the barn.

She stopped and looked at him gloomily.

"I wish to say good-bye, and to beg your pardon," said he. "I did not need much—didn't worry you long," and he smiled.

"On the contrary, you have cost me much. You take with you the remainder of the love my father had for me. You stopped long enough to change me from indifference to enmity. It's true the harvest isn't a very goodly one."

She passed him without further greeting, and went into the house.

Mrozowiecki was astounded. Then, because he gave Shumski a chance to get back his position he is his foe. Because he did not wish to cause the girl any trouble, she accuses him of robbing her of her father's heart. Lord, who is guilty—he or these people? He lost his usual clear judgment, and could only think, in the depths of his soul, that he was very poor, very badly treated, and very sad. Stupid, thrice stupid, *anima vilis*!

CHAPTER IV.

AT length the long-expected time for the yarmark at Kurhan approached, and changed the quiet town into a strange panorama of the Asiatic East. The streets did not afford enough room for business transactions, so the frozen river Tobol was also used. There, were displayed mountains of meat. Skinned and frozen oxen formed whole streets. Entire sheep, dipped in water and shining with ice, were accumulated in enormous heaps. There were also mounds of cut-up meats, fish, skins, pyramids of butter, barrels of grease—all the riches of the steppes.

Along these peculiar streets passed hundreds and thousands of Siberians, Kirghizes, merchants, agents, carriers, drivers—there was an enormous amount of movement and noise. Further on, were erected sheds, with tea, felts, Chinese porcelain, furs, dram-shops, and mountains of nuts. Here bargained the Chinamen and Southerners, strange and wild people, forming a multi-coloured mixture of races, clothing, and dialects.

Beneath this visible merchandise, there circulated also a secret article. Here and there in a corner two people would be seen talking secretly. One of them would pull from his large pocket a pair of scales, and from the other some small shining bars. These were weighed, and the price agreed upon, then the bars were changed for a large bunch of bank-notes. It was stolen gold—very often counterfeit money. The risk was on both sides.

After sleeping the whole year, Kurhan held concentrated for these few days many thousands of people, transacting millions of business.

Already the first day Mrozowiecki sold part of the fish which belonged to him, after having divided with Andryanek, for which he got thirty-five roubles. Shyshkin's money brought him good luck, and the misery he had been obliged to undergo had taught him absolute economy. Badly dressed and hungry, he wandered whole days about the yarmark, looking, not for necessities, but for things of which he could make use. In the crowd he met an occasional acquaintance. Old Shyshkin stopped him, and having invited him to drink a cup of tea, made him promise that in case there should be any further trouble with his machine, Mrozowiecki should help him at least with advice. Then

this millionaire, in sheepskin overcoat and boots blackened with tar, became talkative. He drank one cup of tea after the other, and, perspiring, told with pleasure the story of his riches.

“I will tell you, my dear! My father was sent to hard labour in Siberia—an old story! He had branded on one cheek, with a red-hot iron, the letter ‘W,’ on the other, the letter ‘Z,’ and on his forehead, the letter ‘O’—also an old story! He married a Siberian woman here in Kurhan. I was clerk, then post-driver, then I had a little store, and afterwards a dram-shop. Then I had a salt-house, and became a gold-miner. Then I began business on the steppe. I was lucky. I rented one distillery, and when I got married, my wife brought me another as a dowry; then came a third and fourth, and I was rich. Ho! ho! If the Lord had given me a son! But the daughters—perfect damnation, my dear boy, and those scoundrelly sons-in-law will blow everything when I die. You are a young beginner. Well; have some more tea. For the service you rendered me, I will give you some advice. If you want to be rich, you must remember three things—never say anything about either your profits or your losses; second, don’t let the money rest idle; and third, don’t disdain any business. I acted that way. Every

business is good. You must be honest—except with the Kirghizes.”

Antoni, encouraged by the friendliness of the old man, said to him smilingly,

“And what would you do if you had thirty-five roubles in your pocket?”

“Oh, my soul! it is a big capital. During the yarmark you can turn it over a hundred times. If you do not make a hundred roubles during these four days, you are good for nothing. The whole year you work for these four days. Only be careful with gold, because you don’t know anything about it. When you have tried everything, and have some experience, then you can try gold.”

As soon as Shyshkin was perceived, he was surrounded by people with different business propositions, so Antoni left him. The old man was sincere in his advice, because, seeing him go out, he shouted after him,

“Listen, my soul, never risk your whole capital in one transaction—never!”

Again Antoni began to wonder what he should begin with. All at once, in the street where the oxen were, some fat merchants called to him:

“Eh, you there! You are doing nothing. Come and help me load the meat.”

He hesitated for a second only, and then, in company with several peasants, began to carry the frozen giants. They received three roubles for helping to load ten wagons. Antoni's share was twenty kopeks.

He was standing still, warmed with the work, when he heard Shumski's familiar laugh. He was walking with Panna Marya toward the porcelain store. Antoni had already grown so wise that he did not blush, but only bowed silently.

"Whom do I see? You, student of technology, working?" exclaimed Shumski. "I suppose your time is not very expensive. Can I buy it?"

"What for?" asked Antoni.

"Carry a letter for me to Smolin. He is waiting for me at the club, but I don't care to see him now."

Antoni smiled.

"I will carry the letter for fifteen kopeks," he said, "because the club is on my way."

Shumski looked at him hesitatingly, astonished. Finally he gave him the letter and money.

"Oh, *anima vilis!*" said he, in a low voice to Panna Marya. Then added aloud,

"You could have asked me to pay more for this pleasure."

"When my time is more valuable, your

pleasure will cost you more," answered Antoni, going away.

At the club they were drinking and playing cards. Before the gambler Smolin lay a pile of money. He was drunk and feverish. He swore after reading the letter from his gay comrade, but continued to play. The rooms were dark with smoke and the fumes of alcohol. Mrozowiecki left the club with pleasure, and purchased from a peasant three barrels of cedar nuts. The retail sale was profitable, but this peasant was in a hurry, and after a short time spent in bargaining, Antoni took his place and began to weigh out his merchandise, selling it to children and grown-up people. Andryanek perceived him at this occupation. Dressed in his best clothes, the young man was taking a pleasure-stroll with two gigantic girls, thick as barrels, homely, red, and weighing two hundred pounds each. He treated these beauties to nuts purchased from his friend, with whom he chatted for a while.

"Have you seen Shaman yet?" asked he.

"Who is he?"

"He sits yonder in that shanty. He will tell your fortune, pull out your teeth, and sell you medicine. Who knows who he is? He is always at the yarmark. They say he has also



gold; but one must be careful in dealing with him, for he can cheat the smartest of us. He tells everything from cards. I am going to see him. It costs only five kopeks."

He took his tall girls and went away.

From his place, Antoni could see the whole square. Not far from him, Doctor Gostynski had scales, and the tradesmen were selling him butter in enormous quantities. The old man himself sat the whole day at the scales, having no one to take his place. He looked tired and cold.

Towards evening, after Antoni had sold out all his merchandise, without stopping to count up his profits, he rushed over to the doctor. He pitied the old man.

"Can I help you?" he asked, greeting him. "You must be tired. Go and rest."

"Ah, it's you. I am glad you came. I am frozen. Shumski promised to come at noon and take my place, but it all ended in the promise. May God reward you for your help. Here is the money. Take care of the scales. I am going to the bar-room to warm up a little."

He remained for a few minutes with Mrozowiecki, and then left him alone.

Antoni began to receive and weigh the merchandise. On one occasion he was slow in

dealing with a tradesman, who said he was in a great hurry, but Antoni paid no attention to his repeated requests to make haste. He apparently busied himself with the weights, and with looking for a match to light his cigarette; but, in the meanwhile, he maintained a constant look-out for someone. At length he perceived Andryanek coming out of the fortune-teller's booth, and called him.

The peasant approached swiftly.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Be my witness until I call a policeman. There are stones in the butter."

"Ah, you rascal," shouted Andryanek, shaking his fist threateningly at the tradesman.

Hearing the shouting, the crowd soon surrounded the shed. The man, seeing that he was in a tight place, jumped into his sleigh, shook the reins over the horses' necks, and escaped, trampling the people underfoot.

He left his butter behind, and after they had removed the stones, there remained six puds (one pud is equal to forty pounds) of pure butter. Antoni rejoiced, and Andryanek rushed to tell the good news to the doctor.

The doctor came immediately, and gave half the butter the man had left to Antoni.

"Take it—it's yours," he said.

At once Antoni's joy forsook him ; he blushed and stood looking at the butter.

"Don't worry about it," said the old man, "I will change it into money for you. You need not carry it about. It is worth twenty roubles."

"He had good luck!" exclaimed someone in the crowd.

Antoni took his reward without thanks, and not wishing to be the subject of looks and remarks, he squeezed through the crowd and disappeared. The doctor looked after him, wondering what was the matter with him.

"Is he not satisfied?" thought he. "He is grasping. Well, I did not suspect him of that until now."

Antoni strolled about for a long time, until he succeeded in overcoming his inexpressible grief at being thus misunderstood. He followed the crowd, and finally, at nightfall, entered an inn. He ate a scanty supper, and afterwards, while resting on a bench, swore never to render anyone another service. When again he entered the square, he counted only mentally, and made plans for further business. Night did not stop the transactions. On account of the snow and the Aurora Borealis, it was almost as bright as day. The crowd circulated without rest. Everybody was in feverish haste.

"Haven't you a carriage? I need one." Antoni heard on every side.

He liked the idea of having a horse and wagon, but he thought best to wait until spring. In the meantime his shoulders served him to carry heavy weights, and he hastened about perspiring, notwithstanding the cold, and gathering in silver and copper money. He did not count the money, repeating to himself Shyshkin's statement that he should have a hundred roubles at the close of the yarmark. Toward morning, tired to death, he passed an inn, where a great crowd of people came to have their fortunes told, and purchase medicine. A sign, in rough letters, announced that Shaman's might and great talents were at their disposal. He followed the others and entered the shed.

From the first izba (room), where they were selling tea and some zakuski, the people passed further, leaving the fee, five kopeks, with the woman who sat at the door. Antoni paid also, and entered a long narrow room where were only a table, a wooden trunk, and a stove, with a man sitting near it. The man was dressed in a brownhalat (long coat) and a very high felt shapka (cap). His complexion was dark, and his uncombed hair and beard gave him a wild appearance. He turned his

piercing eyes and hawk-like nose toward his client. He looked like a hideous spider, lying in wait for its prey. Antoni looked at him, and was seized with fright and repulsion, like that we feel on beholding a snake. Mechanically he retreated toward the door, but it was closed, and he soon became ashamed of being so feeble-minded.

In the meanwhile the sorcerer rose noiselessly, and, walking like a spirit, approached Mrozowiecki. He squinted his eyes and moved his jaws as though he were chewing. Under the influence of this look, Antoni felt as though he were paralyzed; he stood waiting in silence. This lasted for some time. It seemed to him as if those eyes entered into his soul, piercing his whole being.

Finally, Shaman spoke. He had a harsh voice, with a decided foreign accent.

"What is your name?"

Antoni started, and said with difficulty,

"I am a stranger. You don't know me."

"It is exactly because you are a stranger that I ask you. And perhaps I do know you. What do you wish?"

"You are telling fortunes; tell mine."

Shaman pulled cards from his *halat*, and began to lay them on the table. His hands

trembled, and he looked constantly at the young man.

"Are your parents still living?" he asked.

"No."

"A sister?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to know what has been, or what will be?"

By this time Antoni had become perfectly calm.

"Can you tell me if I shall be successful here?"

"Yes, you will be successful, but not easily, and not soon. There will be a death—then sickness and losses. You will succeed, if a certain man will help you. Search for him! Search!"

Antoni looked at the cards.

"Shall I find him?"

"Yes, but it will cost you much. You must first gather much money. Your foes are very powerful."

"How far off is the man who will help me?"

"On the earth is never far; search and gather!"

"You mentioned a death. Who will die?"

"Your sweetheart. It will be a heavy blow to you. Have you been long in this country?"

"Not very."

"Then you are not yet devoured by home sickness. Aha! And there, in your country, how is it? Misery?"

Antoni only nodded.

Again Shaman looked at him inquisitively. He asked him some short and indifferent questions, as though wishful to gather material for his predictions. But Mrozowiecki would not speak much about himself. The sorcerer had guessed something; but he could not say any more.

The young man put his hand in his pocket and said,

"How much?"

Shaman began to shiver.

"A rouble—a silver rouble. You will give me a hundred when my prediction is realised. Don't you need some medicine? It don't cost much! And perhaps you will buy some gold. Here it is!"

He took out a dirty little bag, and poured from it some different sized grains, which he immediately gathered together with his hooked fingers. Antoni was again seized with aversion for the man's spider-like movements. He threw a rouble on the table, and retreated toward the door.

"Be in good health! I wish you success!" said the sorcerer. "I shall see you next year."

"I don't think so," answered the young man, going out. He was angry with himself for making this visit to the sorcerer. He was trying to get away from the place without being noticed, when he met Andryanek, who, a little tipsy, singing and shouting, was driving his wild troyka among the people.

"Sit down!" he called to his fishing companion, "I have no more business. I have blown in all that I have to blow in, and bought all that I had to buy. Shaman predicted a wedding for me. Let us go home. No one decent is at the yarmark now."

This invitation pleased Antoni, and he jumped into the sleigh and they galloped off.

"Well, and what did Shaman predict for you?"

"Nonsense!"

"How much did you pay him?"

"One rouble."

"Smart! He knows how to shave the ship. I gave him twenty kopeks."

"Then he cheated me twice. I am paid for my stupidity."

"And how much did you make on the yarmark?"

"I haven't counted yet."

"And what are you going to do now?"

"I shall buy a horse and a wagon."

"Good idea! I will sell you my mare, cheap; more so, because I have a younger one."

"Will you feed her through the winter?"

"I will. I have plenty of hay, and she will work for the oats. You had better stay with us. We will drive round together until you become better acquainted."

"Very well. I will board with you, and for your help I shall be most grateful."

"Don't mention it. I like you. You shall play for me at my wedding."

"Andryanek, you are a good fellow!"

"You are a good companion also. Here we are in Lebiaza."

Antoni slipped his hand in his pocket, and felt the money there with pleasure. At last he felt solid ground beneath his feet, and joy entered his heart.

CHAPTER V.

A WEEK after the yarmark, Panna Marya was obliged to inspect the dram-shops. None of their own horses were available, as the doctor had gone to Shchedrynsk to purchase more rye. She therefore sent to Kwasnikoff's—this was Andryanek's name—to get a sleigh.

After some time the sleigh-bells resounded in front of the house, and a little later Mrozowiecki entered the kitchen, whip in hand.

Old Utowich clapped her hands.

"What, a guest! Sit down. I shall not let you go until Marya gets back. I am lonely. We will talk about our country."

"I did not come on a visit. Andryanek is away. Maybe, Panna Marya will hire my horse and sleigh. I have a good horse."

"Ah, it's true! You are now a coachman," said Panna Marya, smiling; "very well. Let us be going."

She looked at him carefully, while old Utowich said,

"You are not looking well. Are you sick? Did you receive the letter? It was addressed here. My Lord! Perhaps it contained some bad news from your sweetheart! She must be longing for you."

The boy blushed.

"Well, that cannot be helped," he answered, turning his head away.

Panna Marya began to dress for the journey, and the old woman prattled on,

"You should have brought her with you. It's difficult to bear love and separation. Have you written to her?"

"Quite a long time ago. I don't have much time, and then there's nothing to write."

"Well, send her a kiss, at least! Pan Shumski writes every week, and sometimes twice a week."

"Let us be going," said Panna Marya, "but where is Siergey?"

"Where? In the bar-room to be sure! My dearest, don't leave me alone. This drunkard will freeze outside. My dear Pan Antoni, have pity—go and bring him inside. What can I do with that frozen log? I can't lift him in from the snow."

"I will bring him in right off," said Antoni, leaving the room.

In fact, he brought the "log," and put "it"

in the kitchen. Siergey protested that he was sober, and asked Katalay to be his witness. He promised to get the dinner ready, but he could move neither hand nor foot. Old Utowich began to scold him, and in the meanwhile the young people went out to the street.

Mrozowiecki's horse and sleigh were very decent, and the old mare was well kept. Panna Marya noticed this immediately. Antoni wrapped up her feet carefully, patted the dog, Tomoy, and they were off.

It was still dreadfully cold. Neither spoke a word—their farewell, at the time Antoni left the house, was in the mind of each, and it made them uneasy.

They stopped before the first dram-shop in Petrofska. The bar-tender recognised Antoni, and greeted him.

"Glory to God! You are already in business?" said he, handing Mrozowiecki a glass of vodka.

Antoni smiled. With downcast eyes he was sitting caressing the dog. He awakened, as from a dream, when Panna Marya called him.

"Have a glass of vodka?" said she.

"No thank you."

On their way home she said,

"It's strange how this dog likes you, although generally he does not like strangers."

"Dogs sometimes distinguish friends from foes better than human beings."

"Then my dog has no chance to show his talents with you."

"Let it be as you like," he answered.

She noticed that this had hurt him.

"You have a good horse. Did you do well during the yarmark?"

"With your father's present I earned one hundred roubles. I shall be able to live on that until spring. But here the spring comes very late."

"The snow will disappear in May, but we have no spring here. All at once, without any transition, the short, burning summer follows the cold weather. In October winter commences again. We who must live here do not see any spring."

Antoni dropped the reins, and turned toward her—a light passed over his face.

"In our spring," he said, breathing deeply, "even though it is grey and like the winter, without any bright colouring, how much life and health there is in it. It is February now, and in our country toward noon the sun is bright and the wind is heavy. Hope then springs in the heart."

Panna Marya shook her head.

"Panie* Mrozowiecki," said she, "you must not speak of it. Here one must not even speak of those things. You don't know yet how careful one must be here, even with his thoughts. It is a poison which paralyzes both the will and the thought."

"Then you also know all about it?" he said, sighing.

She smiled sadly.

"I was three years old when my parents came here. My brother was eight. I spent seventeen years in Kurhan. There I became accustomed to being a Siberian. I know, also, that I shall die here, therefore I am forbidden to think of my country!"

"Then you never long to get away?" he asked, seeing no indiscretion in questioning her, without being authorised to do so,

"I never said anything about it to anyone," she said thoughtfully, "but it has always seemed to me that this perpetual martyrdom, this longing which must be overcome, has made me wicked. I think that one to whom it is forbidden to love his own country, cannot love anything. Such a man or woman does not attain his full growth—he does not blossom, but becomes dried-up stubble."

* Vocativus of Pan.

Antoni listened, astonished. Then she was interested in something more than ciphers and mechanical work?

"Then you also feel this longing?" he asked again.

"I was young also. I saw three such springs as you speak of. For three years I was in a boarding school at Warsaw. I should have remained there, but mother was ill and I returned to take care of her. She was ill for a long time, and I was obliged to keep house, and look after the store and dram-shops. To stifle my longing I worked at the accounts at night. Then I fell very, very ill. My mother died. I remained here, and I was cured. This snow is mine—this house is mine—this sun is mine. This country yields riches, health, and liberty—it's paradise compared with that other."

She laughed bitterly, and her dark eyes grew darker and more gloomy.

Mrozowiecki shivered.

"As for me, if I can only exist until spring, I shall go back," murmured he. "I will go to my poor country on foot."

"Because there you have someone for whom you care."

"If I cared for them I should stay here. You

yourself said, that this country yields riches and freedom. But in my misery I do not think of them. Do you know, that there are some days when one is afraid to touch a knife—some nights when one groans like a tortured spirit. It is hard to live twenty-four hours—how then could one bear a whole lifetime!”

“Others have suffered the same—and remained,” she said.

“If I were not ashamed of myself, and if it were not out of pity for my sister, I should have killed myself long ago. I suppose others must be stronger. Why did you rescue me that night? I can’t stand it—I can’t. I shall go——”

“Or you will be cured and become a machine! You have too much time to think.”

“I can do nothing. For two weeks I have not been able to sleep. I cannot eat. Perhaps I shall go mad.”

“Like Ksiondz Ubysh.”

“I am afraid I shall not live until spring.”

She looked at him, as one might look at a child, and began to speak softly.

“In the beginning it is only an indescribable sadness and uneasiness. One cannot work, or give attention to anything. Then comes internal rebellion, and hatred of people—anger toward

even inanimate objects—then the mad desire for flight, or for death, as the only means of salvation.”

“It is as though you read my thoughts.”

“It is the Siberian epidemic, as my father says. Then comes the breach—the lack of motion, and thought of environment, and impressions of the senses. It seems that the soul leaves the body and seeks its own country, for to ears come far-off sounds, and to nostrils faint perfumes, and before one’s eyes rise views which are not of this country. At such a moment, a man is wicked, yet harmless. But when the spirit returns it brings with it love of life and motion, then one forgets the past. Never will he mention it, never think of it, but it is the end of youth, of joy, of sentiment, of his better self. He becomes as the people born here. Have you not noticed that they never laugh heartily? They are never merry without vodka! This country stunts the human mind; the people are all machines.”

“I do not wonder that Zdanowski became a drunkard, and that Rudnicki wishes to marry a Siberian girl. Despair urges them on to excesses. I am afraid of myself.”

“Why do you not bring your fiancée here? I suppose it is easier to suffer when one is not alone.”

"She is not well. My sister writes me that she is coughing. Such is my lot!"

They arrived at the second dram-shop, and the conversation was stopped. It was now noon, and she invited Mrozowiecki to dine with her.

He refused, but she insisted cordially, talking to him as to a sick man.

"If you do not eat you will lose strength, and will be unable to wait until spring. If you become ill, how will you be able to earn money for your journey? You must eat—you must shake off this apathy."

She touched his shoulder, handing him some meat. He looked at her with very sad eyes, and obeyed like a child. He ate and drank. She then gave him money to count, to prevent him from sinking back into his apathetic condition, while she looked over the book accounts. He became more cheerful, looked at the people, and attended to his horse. She tried every means to keep him from thinking of the dangerous subject, and when they reached the third dram-shop, she began to instil other thoughts into his mind.

"It's not enough that you should be a mere driver," she said. "You must find some other occupation. Shyshkin asks my father for you every time they meet. Why did you not accept the position offered you?"

"I do not wish to be in anyone's way—especially in yours."

"You mean Shumski's? You would only render him a service. Once his large and easily earned salary is cut off, he would become more serious and stop his fast life. He has too good a position, and I fear this prosperity. And then, Shumski is a cosmopolitan. He will make a career anywhere. He is a lawyer by profession, a merchant by inspiration, and a mechanical engineer by accident."

Antoni smiled.

"His is a more select, higher organization—not an *anima vilis*," he murmured.

"Were you angry with him?"

"I? With Shumski? I should then be very stupid—even more stupid than he imagines me."

"I was sure that you did not care what he said."

"It's a common thing in the world. The one who is poor, alone, and humiliated—he is an *anima vilis* for the amusement of his fellow-men. In Siberia, as well as Europe, the same principle applies."

He whipped up his horse, and added with a smile,

"I am accustomed to it. Fate and mankind have experimented on me. My life was hard,

and my sister, observing it, used to say, 'Antoni, you deserve happiness. Fate is your debtor and sometime she will pay you.'

Panna Marya made an impatient movement, and her eyes again became dark.

"It is not true!" she said bitterly. "Man's destiny is for his whole life. One is born to enjoy life, to succeed in love, in winning human favour, and to abuse others. Another is born to be hated, treated with indifference, or forgotten altogether. A man who is not born with good-luck, gets no pay for his suffering."

"That is not true," he said with gentle dignity. "Honest work brings its own peace, and poverty borne patiently, makes a man broader natured and better. Perhaps the one who has least for himself, has most in himself. That also constitutes riches."

"Then you do not rebel?" she asked, much interested in the subject and in him.

"Never! I cannot revolt against evil, because I have never been well off. I have always been poor, insignificant, and down-trodden. Always—some of my fellow-creatures have laughed at me, others abused me; no one loved me but your brother, and he is no more. Therefore I can be satisfied with anything, and suffer much, and I think, even if fate does not repay me, I shall

not hate my fellows who are more fortunate than I. It adds to one's self respect."

Panna Marya dropped her head and bit her lips.

"You are a piece of perfection!" she said in her usual icy voice.

He was surprised at this sudden change, and looked at her in astonishment.

"Have I offended you in any way?" he asked gently. "If I have, you must pardon me."

"Not at all. You have had the opportunity of appreciating me as others have. I don't consider myself any better."

He did not understand, but her face bore such a repellent look, that he dared not question her. After a while he asked timidly,

"Do you permit a driver to smoke?"

"Certainly."

"We must take the dog in the sleigh. The poor thing is cold. Jump in, Tomoy!"

He noticed that her feet were not well covered, so he stopped and wrapped them up carefully.

"It is not at all necessary. I am very well as I am."

"We have still ten versts to drive. Are you not cold?" he said, looking at her frankly.

His dark brown eyes had in them the same

goodness and quiet, which were the essence of his being. One could see his soul was as a piece of refined gold, cleansed of its baser alloy in the fire of adversity and misfortune. He did not understand her sudden fancies and bitter outbursts, but he knew now how to treat her, the ice of diffidence being broken between them.

"Perhaps you would be willing to employ me oftener? If Doctor Gostynski is likely to be late, I can go to-morrow and bring the vodka."

"Yes! It's easier than to live under the same roof with us!" she answered sharply.

"Well, I couldn't stand it," he said frankly.

"My father resented it very much."

"It would have been worse had I remained. I am not a very gay companion, and I should only have been in the way."

"Yes, you did not wish to expose yourself to annoyance. It was more comfortable to retreat, and not have your peace disturbed."

"I did not wish to repay you with ingratitude for saving my life."

"Then you believe that to keep one in ignorance of a falsehood is a service and a proof of gratitude? I can assure you then that I am not ignorant, and I call your proceeding an act of cowardice and ingratitude. If my father knew he would be even more resentful than he is now, when he

thinks you left only on account of egotism and greed."

"You are perfectly right, but I could not act differently."

"You are more free now. It is better to be independent. But, at any rate, you might come and see us. My father would be much pleased. The evenings are long. What do you do when you do not drive?"

"I assist my friends. With Andryanek I knit nets, I make furniture, and fetch wood. I did not come to see you because you bade me good-bye in such a manner that I understood I ought not to trouble you any more."

"Ought I to apologize?"

"Not at all. I must have been guilty if you were angry; but, if you will permit, I will come next Sunday to serve at mass."

"Very well. Rogowsky has gone to Tobolsk."

In the distance the cercoff was visible, and soon they reached home.

"Will you come in, so that I can pay you?"

"No matter. Leave it until I have earned more, then I shall have some credit in the store."

"Then come to-morrow, and you can go to purchase the vodka for our dram-shops."

"I will be here at daybreak."

He saluted and drove away.

Next day he came as promised, and furnished the dram-shops with vodka. When he got back the doctor was at home, and they made him stay for the evening. The old man was evidently fond of him, and inquired solicitously regarding his projects and means, giving him some good advice. He also inquired what news he had from the country.

Antoni did not tell him of his plans, and tried to conceal the fact that he was very low-spirited. After that he did not put in an appearance for several days, as they did not ask him. Neither did he come on Sunday. They saw nothing more of him.

"He is out of sorts again," the doctor said to himself.

One day old Marcyanna, the mother of one of the Polish settlers, came to the store, and said,

"Do you know, Panna Marya, that the young man who lived with you for a while is dying?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the girl.

"Sure, I was there yesterday. There was a wedding at Kwasnikoff, and they invited me. Andryanek himself said to me, 'I am glad I have a wife, but I am also sorrowful for my friend.' Antoni is dying. I went to see him.

He didn't recognise me, but I told him that I was his countrywoman, and had come to help him. He asked me to bring him a priest, and perhaps Ksiondz Ubysh could see him. He is one of us, and he deserves it."

Panna Marya listened quietly. Then she locked the store, and went to see her father. The old man was greatly shocked, and exceedingly sorry. He would wait for no breakfast, but went immediately to see the young man.

When he returned old Utowich rushed to him.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"No. He took cold, and is devoured with the Siberian fever. I will save him from the fever, but I cannot cure his mental illness. Somebody should have looked after him. The people with whom he lives are good souls, but they don't understand his needs."

"I am going to read some prayers to him," said old Utowich, and she wrapped herself in her shawl, and took with her the worn-out prayer-book. In order to be prepared for anything she also took a gromnica* and a bottle of holy water.

Antoni had a little room behind the kitchen. The air was damp and thick. He had furnished

* Consecrated wax candles which they light when someone dies.

the room himself, and stored there all his wealth—the harness and oats for the mare, parts of a wagon made by himself of wood, a few sheepskins, bought of the Kirghizes, and an old felt, together with a hatchet, a tin samovar,* and several other small articles, which were jumbled together without any attempt at order. He sat all day long on a straw mattress near the stove. In that position the old woman found him, and she made up her mind that he must soon die.

She wished to talk, but he did not answer, so she sat at the window, and began to read from her book, one prayer after another, looking from time to time to see if she should light the gromnica. The daylight faded, the old woman grew hoarse, and the sick man drew nearer the stove, shaking spasmodically and groaning pitifully. Utowich lighted the gromnica.

At that moment someone softly opened the door, and Panna Marya appeared on the threshold.

“What are you doing?” she asked, frightened.

“Well, he is dying.”

“Has he taken his medicine?”

“There is no need to trouble him. Don’t you

* An apparatus to make tea.

see he is dying? Perhaps Ksiondz Ubysh could give him absolution."

The girl looked at the sick man, touched his forehead and hands, and then, without saying anything, blew out the gromnica and lighted an oil lamp. Then she called Andryanek.

"Haven't you another room?"

"We have, but he didn't want it."

"He can't resist now. He must be taken from here."

The peasant took Antoni in his arms and carried him to another room. The women followed.

Andryanek's parents gave him their own room. They put him to bed, and Panna Marya forced him to take some medicine. Then she mixed a hot drink, recommended Andryanek to watch him until the next morning, placed a shade before the window, and went out. Utowich trotted after her, her religious sentiments much outraged, and repeating angrily,

"You will see—it will be as I said. You will see!"

"We shall see!" retorted the girl.

Next day Antoni was still alive.

"You would have burned the whole gromnica," said Marya, jokingly.

"Well, he is young. The soul leaves the

body slowly. He may live a couple of days longer."

The doctor went again to see him, and came back looking very grave. He prepared new medicine, and said to his daughter,

"Take this to him. I don't know that I can pull him through. He has the same symptoms as Anthony."

Without displaying any emotion, the girl took the medicine and went out.

Antoni recognised her.

"You must excuse me," he whispered. "There is no use in your troubling yourself, but I thank you just the same. It's only a trouble and expense, and I shall never be able to repay you. I will greet Anthony for you."

He spoke quietly without regret.

"I was preparing for my journey, but I see that I must stay here. I should like to write to my sister, but I can't move. Well, she will know just the same."

"I will write to her if you wish, but there is no need. You will soon be well again. Take your medicine, please."

"It is no use wasting the medicine. Why should I get better? One must die some day. I am glad I shall have some rest soon."

"I did not know you were such a lazy man,"

she said, giving him the medicine. "Not he who wishes will die, but he who does not wish, and when he does not wish."

"You must not make me feel bad. If you will be so kind, you might write a letter to my sister."

She found a sheet of paper, and looking into space, he began softly:

"DEAR WALKA:—It is better that you should know the truth immediately than be kept in uncertainty. Do not expect me any more. I am bidding you farewell for ever. I am dying. I have not written you about my illness because I thought it would pass, but it seems it was not to be.

"Be careful in telling Jozia. Thank her for her kindness, and take care of her for my sake. If I have caused you sorrow, pardon me and remember me in your prayers. I am very weak. I will ask to have the date of my death written in this letter, so you will know when I ceased thinking of you. It is very, very cold here, and a great void."

Panna Marya stopped writing, and looked sadly at the letter. The sick man completely exhausted lay quiet. She folded the letter, and stood motionless for a while. Her own trouble seemed petty

and small when compared with the bitterness of this man's fate. Poor, sick, alone, after a hard life, after a continuous fight with adverse fortune, he was now leaving the world without any protest, without complaint. He had had no pleasure, and he made no moan. She felt an intense pity for him. She approached the bed softly, and gave him something to drink. She thought of the many times she had offended him, and felt guilty, humiliated.

A noise was heard in the house, and Utowich rushed in.

"Marya! What a misfortune. Shumski has arrived," she said, out of breath.

"What of it? Father is at home."

"No, he isn't. I told Shumski that you had gone to see Kotnickis. He waited for an hour, and then wanted to go after you. I was dreadfully frightened, and came myself. Jesus! If he finds out!"

"What?" the girl asked impatiently.

"That you are here with an unmarried man!"

Antoni, awakened by the conversation, opened his eyes and listened.

"Are you crazy?" asked Panna Marya. "Please go and tell him the truth, and entertain him until I return."

"It's you who are crazy!" said the angry old

woman. "Is he your brother that you are taking care of him? Your father told you to do it, but you should disobey your father. He doesn't know what is proper. There is no common-sense in exposing your reputation for the sake of a stranger. It is not the place for a young girl."

"That is true," whispered Antoni. "Again I am the cause of trouble for you. Pray forgive me. I thank you for everything you have done. And now good-bye. We shall not see each other again. May God give you all happiness."

Utowich was ashamed of her outburst, and became silent.

Panna Marya was pale, and her eyes shone.

Without haste she prepared to go.

"I will come again toward evening," she said. "You must not think of dying. Don't forget to take the medicine. My father will be here within an hour. I will send some broth and some milk. I am sure you will be better soon."

The women did not speak on the way home.

Shumski met them half way. He was very cross.

"Where do you come from?" he asked stiffly, looking at his watch.

"I visited a sick man," she answered coolly.

"I was told that you had gone to see Kotnickis."

"Aunt thought I had gone there. I am not accustomed to tell her or anyone else where I go."

Shumski bit his lips. They entered the house, and Panna Marya went to the kitchen.

"Grynia," she called, "take some broth and milk, and carry it to Andryanek for Pan Mrozowiecki."

The old woman trembled, and Shumski smiled bitterly.

"Then Pan Mrozowiecki is the object of your special and solicitous attentions?"

"Yes."

Here Utowich tried to intervene.

"The poor thing is dying," said she. "The doctor says he is liable to die at any moment."

"Not a great loss," growled Shumski.

Panna Marya went upstairs, and Shumski followed her. In the dining-room he stopped her.

"My queen, permit me to kiss your hands. I haven't seen you for such a long time."

She did not deny him, and remained indifferent and distracted.

"I hurried to you with good news," he continued, looking tenderly into her eyes. "I have received a letter from my parents giving their consent to our marriage. My father presents

me with a drug store in Suwalki, and he awaits us impatiently. There is nothing now in the way of our happiness, and I beseech you to appoint the day for our wedding. I am dying with impatience. Be merciful to your most humble servant."

He drew nearer and embraced her. She drew back hastily and with determination.

"You know that I am not fond of tender scenes. I am glad you have your parents' consent, but I do not wish to be married before my time of mourning is over. I shall do this for my father's sake. My brother's death is too recent for me to think of marrying now. And why should we hasten? Your contract only ends in two years."

"Just enough time to sell out."

"Who? You?"

"I have only the capital. I am speaking of your father."

"My father has no intention of selling out. That was his condition. If you stay here, you will get all he has. If not, you take me with five thousand roubles as dowry."

"Yes, I know it, but I thought when your father knew me better, he would change his mind and go with us."

"Never!"

"But we cannot leave him alone. In case he should die, they would steal everything here before we could come."

Panna Marya began to laugh.

"Well, then, go alone, and I will remain with pleasure," said she.

Shumski blushed.

"You misunderstood me. If your father will consent to make me his superintendent, I will arrange everything. He is quite old, and it is time he took a rest. I will sacrifice my inclinations and undertake the work. Perhaps later we can persuade him to go with us."

"The money question does not concern me at all. Speak to my father about it."

"But you will help me, will you not?"

"I have no influence over my father. Notwithstanding his age he has a will of his own. If he consents I will not oppose it."

"You have no heart. I get nothing in exchange for my love," he complained.

"You received what you asked for—my hand. You have known me for two years, and it seems that I am the same always."

"Yes, the same always—pitiless, cruel."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am the same to everybody," she answered bitterly.

Old Utowich looked in, but seeing them seated near each other her mind became easy. She began to lay the table, looking at them from time to time. She was glad that everything was "all right."

Shumski remained all day, and was then obliged to stay over night, for a heavy snowstorm set in on the steppe. They spoke of business and the approach of spring. In the meantime a high wind shrieked round about the house, the snow fell thickly, cutting off all communication with the outside world.

Panna Marya bent over her sewing, with her thoughts on Mrozowiecki. It was impossible to go to him, and perhaps the poor boy was in agony. The next day, and the day after, no one was able to go to see him. The great snowstorm continued, and all Lebiaza was covered. There was no pathway even to the barns, and the village showed no signs of life.

Shumski still remained, wearied, but trying not to show it, and speaking with uneasiness about the distilleries only in order to get away as soon as he could.

Finally, on the fourth day, forty degrees of cold froze nature herself, and quieted everything. The people began to move about again. First

Shumski went away, and then Marya, as usual, went to visit the dram-shops. She sent to inquire for Mrozowiecki. He was alive, so the doctor immediately went to see him. She put away the letter he had written to his sister, and was glad the poor boy lived.

Then she became absorbed in her work, and only once her father mentioned him to her.

"He is stronger than Anthony," he said, as though he regretted it.

At last Mrozowiecki was on his feet again, and came to thank them for their care. He placed ten roubles before the doctor.

"What do you mean?" asked the old man, with great indignation. "Do you mean to pay me?"

"Yes. The medicine was an expense to you, and the wine and broth also. When I caught the thief it did not cost me anything, and you paid me for it. If you estimate a service at a price, I must be permitted to do the same, although I am poorer than you."

"I didn't know you were so sensitive. At that time I thought you were not satisfied because I had not paid you enough. Well, put your money in your pocket, and forgive me this time. You are not rich enough to pay me for the joy I have in seeing you alive. If you wish

to pay your debt, come to see me oftener, when you have time."

Seeing that the boy hesitated, he took the bill and put it into his pocket, and then embraced him.

At that moment Tomoy jumped on him with a cordial greeting. Behind the dog Panna Marya appeared.

"How do you do," she said with a smile, shaking hands with him.

Old Utowich also came to congratulate him, and even Siergey smiled a greeting. Everybody was glad to see him. He spent the evening with them, and the doctor was cheerful in his companionship. The young girl also talked oftener than usual. They even laughed a little when he told them about Andryanek's wedding, and the mistakes made by the young married man. He related the village gossip to Utowich, and she was so happy that she told his fortune. Then he spoke of his visit to Shaman.

"Oh, he is a bird!" said the doctor. "He is not Shaman, but some suspicious character. He lives out on the steppe about three hundred miles from here. He owns the farm. I used to visit him when I went round selling scythes. He built a small fortress of dirt and wood. He must be rich, for he deals in gold and counterfeit

bank-notes. I have known him for twenty years. I think he must have escaped from the katorga.* I see him every year at the yarmark."

Mrozowiecki only half listened, for in the meantime old Utowich was telling him marvellous things with the cards. It was quite late when he wished them good-night, and Panna Marya said,

"Stay until to-morrow. The room is empty and you are not strong. You might get a relapse very easily."

"Thank you, but I must return and feed my horse."

"That is true. You already have your duties," she laughed.

"I make my living out of the beast. I must take care of her," he said.

The doctor again urged him to come oftener. The next day he counted his money, and then asked Andryanek's advice.

Acting on this, he purchased an old rifle, and thenceforth, when he was not busy driving, he went out on the steppe, at first with a friend and then alone, when he was better acquainted with the country. He became a very enthusiastic huntsman, and the vast solitude suited his mood.

* Hard labour in Siberia.

After a month or so had passed, he rushed every day along the shores of the river Tobol, or through the birch wood, half covered with snow, and sometimes when he went too far it was late at night before he reached home.

The fatigue and hard work helped him to conquer his longing, and he preferred to go out on the steppe than to go driving, because, with the gliding motion of the sleigh, his sad thoughts came trooping back. Andryanek was a faithful friend. He made him familiar with the country—with the habits of the animals, and taught him to set traps and chase the foxes. He was not envious of Antoni's success, on the contrary he helped him prepare the skins, and was glad when he was more than ordinarily successful. Antoni did not meet many people. Once out on the steppe he saw two vagabonds, who, on perceiving him, began to cry for bread. He gave them his whole day's provisions, and looked at them with sympathy. Perhaps a longing, like his own, drove them to chose this dreadful life.

Sometimes he met a fellow-hunter, and they passed one another, each looking enviously at the other's bag of game. He found this man was a Tartar, and kept a watchful eye on him, not being uncertain of the intentions of one of

a nation of robbers. Usually, however, he did not see anyone. The loneliness and quiet of the country was maddening. He walked there without being noticed, afraid to speak or to whistle. It seemed as though there he was in the very presence of the Almighty. And the wind stopped his breath—the cold froze him to the bone, as the March sun was without power.

Thus Antoni hunted the grey squirrel on the uval,* and he learned where to find the ermine on the banks of the Tobol. Sometimes he killed a white fox, but he did not disdain the white rabbits which swarmed on the steppe, and set snares for partridges. He preserved the skins, and every Sunday went to Kurhan to market to dispose of his game. They did not pay much for it, but he was faithful to Shyshkin's teaching, and did not disdain any gain, however small.

In this way he saved kopeks and roubles. Sometimes he counted his money, and lived on the thought of going back to his country. He had planned, the next spring, when there would be some grass, to drive his horse as far as possible, and then sell him and the telega, and continue his journey on foot, earning some money by working at anything he could find

* An artificial long mound made along a river.

to do and resting when exhausted. Perhaps in the autumn he would behold his country again. When he had a great many skins, he went to Tobolsk and sold them there. He already had fifty roubles and was very glad.

He seldom indulged in any enjoyment, but one evening he went with some people to a dram-shop and became quite talkative. He even laughed, and being animated by hope, he sang. He remembered his student days, his fiancée, his youth, and with a pure strong voice he sang in the empty street :

“Lift up your glasses, comrades,
And drink to the health of your sweethearts.
Poor are those boys to whom is strange
The charm of love.”

“The Lord be praised that you are gay!”
said someone behind him.

He stopped singing and saluted Marya. They walked on together, and he told her of his success.

“It is as though I had a hundred roubles, for the mare and the wagon are worth fifty. I will earn more before summer, and then I will go.”

“That’s nice. But you must keep out of bad company, because it spoils your reputation. I had business with the tapster, and he said

to me, 'What can be the matter with Pan Mrozowiecki, that he keeps company with this bad lot?' These young people cause my father much sorrow; they are a disgrace to us. You must forgive me for speaking thus, but I should not like to have the same opinion of you that I have of your comrades."

"I thank you. I did not think of this, and indeed it was the first time I have felt happy. I will promise you, just the same, never to see them again."

They parted at the door of the doctor's house, and the young man, still humming, returned home.

"There is a letter for you. I put it in your room," said Andryanek, half asleep, as he opened the door.

Antoni's heart throbbed. He had had news a short time ago and did not expect to hear so soon again—he was frightened. He lit a candle. A white envelope, crumpled by its long journey, and with several post-marks, lay on the table. His hands trembled as he impatiently opened it. It was from Walka, and evidently written in a great hurry.

"DEAR ANTONI:—We are in great trouble. For the past two weeks Jozia has been very

ill, and I can earn nothing, as I am obliged to nurse her. Our lodgings are damp and poor, and the doctor has ordered her good air, quiet, and comfort for her. We are behind with our rent, and cannot move as our savings are exhausted. Yesterday, to buy some food and medicine, I drew my last savings from the bank. This will last for a couple of weeks. I could have some money advanced by my employer, but am afraid to ask it, not knowing how soon I shall be able to return to my work. Poor Jozia knows nothing of my trouble, for I told her you had sent a hundred roubles. She is very weak and coughs constantly, but if she could only get what the doctor has prescribed, perhaps she might recover. She is so young, and wishes so much to live! I am writing you all this so that you may not reproach me with having kept you in ignorance. I tried to get along as best I could without troubling you, but now I can do nothing more. The spring is very cold and damp. For Heaven's sake let us hear from you; we are much worried on your account."

He laid his head on the table, and for a long time sat motionless. It seemed to him that he was falling over a precipice, and

something throbbed in his head and choked him. His frame was shaken with heavy sobs. The candle burned out, and still he sat there in the darkness, fighting with his misery. Sorrow, the faithful companion of his life, again trampled him under foot, laughing at his hopes and avenging herself for his brief moment of joy.

In the morning he placed his fifty roubles in an envelope, wrote a bright, hopeful letter, and sent it to the post. Then he took his rifle and escaped into the steppe. For three days he killed nothing, and for three days he ate nothing, nor did he speak a word.

Two weeks after, Panna Marya met him at the market in Kurhan, where he had brought his game to sell. He stood trembling in his worn-out tulub and felt boots, and looked very miserable.

Towards evening, returning with goods for the store, she met him again. He was walking quickly on account of the cold.

She ordered the coachman to stop.

"Sit here with me."

He sat with the coachman.

"You spare your horse too much," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I sold it," he answered abruptly.

"Why?"

"I needed the money."

"Have you invested it in some business? You did well! If you have good luck, you ought to double it before spring."

"I did not invest it," he whispered. "I sent it to the girls."

Then he became silent, staring over the steppe. She did not wish to question him further, and they arrived in Lebiaza in low spirits.

Another couple of weeks passed, and there began to be a feeling in the air as though winter was tired at last, and the thermometer rose toward noon. The shanties standing on the Tobol were moved to the shore; fish that emigrated in the spring were found in the river, and the skins of animals became valueless because the hair was rough, and was shed in quantities. Tobolsk and even Kurhan swarmed with tradesmen, eager to sell their wares among the Kirghizes. They spoke of caravans, pastures, and planting, and looked toward the river and the south.

One Sunday Antoni went early to see the doctor. His eyes were red and burned feverishly. Quite a number of people were already present, so he asked Panna Marya to see him in another room.

"I should like to have the priest read a Requiem Mass for me to-day," he said sadly.

"Is it the anniversary of your parents' death?"

"No. My fiancée is dead."

"She has died?" Marya exclaimed.

He only nodded.

Then she understood his misery and the selling of the mare. Everything was gone.

"Poor fellow!" she said sympathetically. "I pity you with all my heart. Stay with us until after mass. Speak to us of your sorrow and it will be easier to bear."

She pressed his hand and her eyes filled with tears.

Ksiondz Ubysh read a Requiem Mass, and the lad prayed for the peace of the soul of the sweet girl who had loved him so dearly, thus taking his farewell of her. She would have lived had his lot been more fortunate. After dinner, when the people had gone, and the doctor had left to see Shyshkin on some business, he told Panna Marya everything. Little by little, a better and more cordial feeling arose between them. It seemed to him only natural to tell her everything about himself. He spoke of his trouble quietly and with resignation.

"When I sent the fifty roubles I got for the mare, she was already dead. My sister paid the

funeral expenses with the money. She died of consumption. She was weak and exhausted from hard work. Walka is again at work. She cannot take a rest, as she has no more money, and I cannot send her more. She writes me that spring is already there and she sent me some violets."

He took the letter from his pocket and handed her the flowers, withered but still fragrant. Both smiled sadly.

"I shall never see fresh ones," he said. "I must stay here."

"What will you do?"

"I can earn my living with my gun. I don't need much. My sister is strong and healthy and can support herself. I must remain here," and he dropped his head on his breast.

He threw the flowers on the floor.

"I must forget everything," he groaned.

CHAPTER VI.

AT last the glorious spring days came, and the Siberian winter was gone. It did not retreat slowly, it did not fight, but ran away, utterly crushed.

Only the day previous a cold north wind blew, the snow lay heavy on the ground, and the ice was thick. But afar to the south, in the warm desert, a mighty wind arose and rushed down like a hurricane upon the country. It came during the night, and poured a stream of warm air over the ice and snow. And behold! In the morning the Tobol shivered, and the waters became dark. The ice broke, and from beneath the water rose. Floating pieces of ice commenced to move northward, crushing, jumping on each other, crowding on the shores, diving and floating, and announcing their march toward the north with a roar as of hundreds of cannon discharged at once.

The mighty wind from the desert followed

them, annihilating the snow on the steppe, striking the frozen tajgi (swamp), and the bunches of dried-up bushes, warming the hard ground, and hurrying on to the ocean. Every year did this hot wind from the desert attack the winter, create the spring, and then, in its turn, become the victim of the eternal ice of the far north. Next year his brother comes to avenge him and to meet his doom in his turn. So this world was created, in order that even disinherited Siberia might have its summer. The Tobol rushed toward the sea, dragging the ice with it, and the steppe poured into it its snows and waters. The river was swollen, and looked like an ocean without shores. It lapped the feet of the uval, flowed near villages, throwing foam over the houses. This lasted only a few days, after which the warm weather checked its speed, and it flowed lazily within its accustomed bounds.

Within two days the steppe was black; in five it showed signs of life; in a week it was green.

Mrozowiecki, who beheld this miracle for the first time, compared it with the invading Mongolians. Like them, Nature knew no obstacle, but rushed onward like a thunder-bolt, crushing everything in her path, and going to sleep when

the impetuous rush was over. As man springs from Nature, so he is like the soil on which he lives.

The warm weather came on at once. The steppe, saturated with moisture, began to tremble and live. Everything grew with wonderful rapidity. It seemed as though the noise of the growing shrubs and the bursting buds could be heard, and the growth of the leaves seen. Immediately the formerly empty places were filled with people. The Kirghizes folded up their yurts, and, leaving their winter quarters, rushed away to the south, taking with them their sheep, cattle, and horses.

They were followed, as armies by vultures, by caravans of merchants selling cotton goods. They marched in large companies, fully armed, and took with them people who had no agricultural interests. At their head was a trustworthy guide, who was familiar with the steppe and the customs of its wild inhabitants.

In a couple of weeks there remained in Kwasnikoff's house only the patriarch of the family and Antoni, the sons being scattered over the steppe with their wives. The old man watched the house and office, and Antoni, having no other occupation, worked by the day in gardens and fields. Hunting was stopped for

some time. He had no money to buy the necessary articles for fishing, and was obliged to earn his living as best he could. In the beginning the work was hard, but necessity forced him to it. He worked with aching neck and feeble arms.

Old Utowich called him to work in the garden, because while he worked, she could talk. Gossiping was her first great weakness ; her second was avarice. She boarded her workman, but said nothing about paying him. The doctor and his daughter had gone to Tobolsk, so the old woman had everything her own way, and introduced new economies. Antoni was ashamed to ask for his pay. This lasted until the doctor returned.

Panna Marya noticed that, notwithstanding the heat, he was working in his sheepskin overcoat, and was very much surprised. He did not even remove it during dinner, which he had in the warm kitchen.

"Come upstairs," she called to him.

"No, thank you, I am very dirty," he said, blushing.

He went back to his work. Toward evening she gave Utowich thirty kopeks for him, and the old woman said,

"It's not necessary. He is working for his

board. He did not ask for any pay. He doesn't work well—he has no experience."

"How many days?"

"Five."

The girl shrugged her shoulders. When he had finished his work, she called him to the store, and counted out ten zlotych.*

"That's for your work in the garden," said she; "and for your driving last winter there are four roubles coming to you. Here they are."

"Less thirty kopeks," said he, pushing back the silver coin. The rest he took and said,

"I don't work very well. I don't know, perhaps you don't care to have me come any more?"

"What an idea! It is hard for a student of technology to become a gardener all at once, but you will learn in time."

"That's true. Then I shall go mowing. I can't do any other work during the summer. Hunting doesn't pay. Nobody buys the birds, and the skins are no good."

He leaned on the counter and still lingered.

"I had a letter from my sister," he said.

"How is she?" Marya asked with interest.

"Not very well. She has some debts."

He pulled a letter from his pocket.

* One zloty is equal to fifteen kopeks.

"You haven't seen any lilac for a long time," he said with a smile. "Here is some she sent."

With hands trembling from hard work, he gave her a branch.

"How lovely," she whispered, caressing the withered flowers.

He blushed.

"Sister begged me to give it you from her, with her thanks for the trouble you took while I was sick. It's nothing, but we had nothing better."

"It is more welcome than anything else."

She placed the flowers in a book and said,

"You had better bring your sister here. You will be both able to get along better; then, you mustn't return home without a million."

He laughed softly, as though it were a good joke.

"Certainly; instead of trying to get back Promieniew by legal methods, it would be better to purchase it from Burski and become a lord."

"Don't laugh. In ten years you may become a millionaire. Ten years ago Smolin was a penniless clerk. One sees such miracles often here—only one must have perseverance."

He did not laugh any more, but looked at her, thinking she joked him without pity

Then he sighed, put the letter and money in his pocket, and prepared to go. In doing so his overcoat opened, and she could see his clothing and linen were in rags. Now she understood why he did not take off his tulub. Two days later she found a piece of paper in the kitchen, which, on examination, she found to be the post-office receipt for four roubles, sent to Walerya Mrozowiecki. She put this in the book with the flowers, saying to herself,

“Oh, *anima vilis* !”

Since the arrival of spring few people gathered in the doctor's house on Sundays. Those who had money had rented a piece of land, and being an agricultural people for generations, they farmed with great enthusiasm. The young men were engaged by the merchants to go into the steppe with caravans. Those only remained who were old and sick, or the lazy ones, who could not stay anywhere for very long. A few men of this sort stopped Antoni on the banks of the Tobol, and tried to induce him to go to a dram-shop. They were already drunk, and when he resisted they began, half in joke, half in earnest, to push him toward the river. He resisted as long as he could, but finally stumbled over a stone, inflicting on himself a painful wound, and, with two of his

aggressors, he tumbled into the river. Some fisherman, attracted by the commotion, arrived on the scene, and pulled them out only half alive. Their bath made his tormentors sober, and they apologized, afraid of being punished, but they did not offer to pay him for his sheepskin overcoat, which was ruined by the water. He dried it, and almost wept when he found he could make no further use of it, for he had nothing else to wear.

Old Kwasnikoff looked at him out of the corners of his eyes.

"You are a stupid boy," he said at last. "It would be a bad summer indeed, if you could not earn enough money for another tulub. Throw it away, and if you haven't the money to buy some cotton for a blouse, take mine."

In this way, for the first time, Antoni was dressed like a Siberian peasant. For some time he could not get used to the pink blouse, but he grew accustomed to that, as to many other things. Now the work was easier, his arms and neck became harder and harder, and he grew stronger. He gave up all his brilliant projects, and became too stupefied to even feel sorrow keenly. He thought only how to get bread for the morrow. He worked like an animal.

One evening he called at Gostynski's. He went there mechanically, thinking that perhaps they would give him some decent work. Passing the kitchen he greeted Ksiondz Ubysh, who seemed not to recognise him, passed old Utowich, who was busy in the store, and went upstairs.

The doctor was in his office, and said to him at once,

"Antoni, will you do me a favour?"

"Anything you ask."

"You will go into the steppe with litowki."

"What do you mean by 'litowki'?"

"Scythes. I bought three telegas (wagons) of them. Now someone must go out on the steppe with them, and travel from village to village, and from farm to farm, to sell them."

The boy hesitated.

"It means the handling of quite a lot of money, and I might be robbed."

"You will have ten men with you."

"But I am not familiar with the villages and roads."

"I will let Grynia go with you. He went with me for four years. He will show you the way, and your escort will defend you in case of need. You can bring the money and return home at the close of the fall. I would go myself, but I am getting too old."

"As you say, but . . ."

"Wait, I know all about the 'buts.' You will get five kopeks commission on every scythe, and your travelling expenses. You will have to take care of everything—feed the people, take command, and see that they do not steal. To-morrow, you will see your people and horses, and pack the things; you must start the day after to-morrow, for at any moment the grass will be ready to mow."

"I am ready and willing to serve you, but I may not be equal to the task."

"That is stupid talk, my dear boy. You know addition and subtraction, you know how to change a rouble. You cannot always work in the garden. Well, then, don't talk nonsense, but sit down and have supper with me. In a few moments all your men will be here. You know them all but one."

In fact they were old acquaintances—Rudnicki, Chyz, Stasiak, and some neighbouring peasants. They sat down to the table without ceremony, and filled the whole house with their free, loud talk.

At length a stranger appeared. He was a tall, blonde young fellow.

"Good evening!" said he.

The doctor brought him to Antoni.

"Here is your last companion. He is a countryman of yours, his name is Andukajtys."

They shook hands, looking into each other's eyes. The new-comer then sat down to the table, and ate enough for three men, but without saying a word. Mrozowiecki liked him, for he also preferred to be silent rather than to talk. They drank lots of tea, and then went out to rest. Only Antoni remained for further instructions, and none of them slept much that night, the women being busy preparing provisions and other articles necessary for the journey into the steppe. The doctor urged them on, Utowich scolded, Antoni placed the packages in the hall, and the drunken Siergey sang to Katalay. Panna Marya spoke little, but worked hardest.

"This is for you," she said, handing Antoni a large package. "You must take this tulub, because in the fall the nights are cold. Don't hesitate, please. You will find everything in your bill—you can't go without clothing."

"Perhaps when I get back you will not be here any more."

"I am not sure about that—I may die."

"May the Lord preserve you!" he exclaimed.

She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"Nobody would be sorry. It makes no difference to anyone whether I die or not."

Her eyes flashed angrily, so he said nothing.

Next day, when the doctor went to wake him, he found him already in the courtyard. With Grynja's aid they pulled out all the wagons and prepared for the journey. First there were barrels with the scythes, then they began to lade the bundles, dishes, and tools. About noon all the men put in an appearance. Shumski appeared unexpectedly for dinner. He criticized everything, and jokingly excited the men against Antoni. The peasant did not pay any attention to this, but the Poles at once began to trifle with their superior, who patiently endured everything. Only Andukajtys took his side. With his mouth full of bread he turned toward Shumski and said,

"If you know better, why don't you go with us? The doctor knew whom he wished to trust. With God's help we shan't be lost."

Again he and Antoni looked into each other's eyes, and felt they were friends.

After dinner the doctor said,

"Well, you must be going. You will pass the night on the steppe."

"Let us see this march," said Shumski, lighting a cigarette.

He went out into the yard, humming gaily.

He was dressed elegantly, and looked very well.

Antoni took command. Grynja drove the first troyka, and with him sat Chyz and two Siberian peasants. They drew out on the road. The peasant Porfiry drove the second troyka, and three men were with him. The third troyka was driven by Rudnicki. Andukajtys drove the fourth, laden with bundles.

Antoni wiped his forehead, shook hands with the doctor and the others, saluting Shumski from afar, then, gathering up the reins, he moved on.

"Holy Joseph protect them!" screamed Utowich.

"Antoni, be careful!" shouted the doctor.

"Have you taken a rifle?" asked Marya.

"Thank you, yes," he answered, taking off his cap.

They drove down the street, followed by all the inhabitants of the house. Even Ksiondz Ubysh appeared much interested in the expedition. He rubbed his hands and laughed. Antoni turned several times, then whipped up the horses to overtake the others, and dust covered everything. The doctor returned to the house with Shumski, talking about business on

the steppe, and only the priest and Panna Marya remained in the street. He turned toward the girl and whispered,

"They went there. They did well. Don't say a word."

Then he blushed and tapped the ground with his foot.

"I have had enough of it. If you like to stay here, very well, but I shall not stay. I have had enough of it. Live in good health. I am going to my parish."

He commenced to gesticulate, and went straight down the road, talking to himself.

"They have nothing here—no organ, only two chasubles, and never a procession. I have had enough of such penance. I was not consecrated a priest for such business! I shall find my way. I will show them that I will find it!"

"Dinner is ready!" said Panna Marya.

This generally quieted the demented man, but to-day it had no effect on him, and she went home.

"Father, Ksiondz Ubysh has an attack, and has gone away. Perhaps you had better call him."

"This is not the first time. He will come back when he gets hungry," said the doctor; and Shumski added,

"The police ought to watch him. We don't keep him here."

Marya shrugged her shoulders.

"As you like," she muttered.

The poor old priest trotted on further and further, led on by one thought. . . . He disappeared on the steppe.

CHAPTER VII.

THE grass was ready to be cut, and the whole steppe, from Tobolsk to Tashkent, was one beautiful wilderness of greenness and flowers. The vast sea of grass was not moved by the faintest breeze. Here and there stood an island of birches, hawthorn, or the snow-white tawoloshka,* on which the eye, tired by the monotony of the green verdure, rested with pleasure.

The villages were far distant one from the other, and the steppe had a wild appearance. Here people, laws, and boundaries were forgotten, and one was reminded of the pre-historic times of which the Bible speaks—of millions of herds, patriarchs, and a virgin country. Here, without count or measure, the soil yielded abundance of grass, in which lurked innumerable birds and beasts. And over all, was the

* The fauna and flora of Siberia, being quite different from those of other countries, certain names of plants and animals cannot be translated.

burning sun, the cloudless sky, and not a breath of air stirring.

What people were obliged to work hard for in other lands, was given here freely, sowed by the munificent hand of Nature, which, like the hand of a rich man, cares not where it throws its riches. There was an abundance of flax, asparagus, beans, strawberries, and cherries—belonging to nobody but the birds of the steppe, or the man who would extend his hand for them. In some places the earth, burned by the sun, was split by deep crevices, whilst in others, the soil shone with drops of dew, glistening like jewels. In some places the steppe, as though hiding from the sun, ran into deep ravines, where the rays of the sun were wrapped in the thickness of the hawthorn and tawoloshka. These ravines were noisy with the cries of the white partridge and red-breasted galanduks.

The even highway, marked with posts, ran across the steppe, branching out into thousands of smaller roads. It extended over hundreds, thousands of versts, and like a great artery, carried through this immensity the strength, life, and thought of the steppes, far—far away to China.

The steppe cared not for limits and human

roads, but extended toward the Tobol, another powerful artery, also carrying the strength and thought of Nature—water. The steppe was thirsty, and therefore reached out toward the river, which fortified itself against the onslaught of the thirsty aggressor, behind a chain of hills, thickly clad with pine trees, as though afraid of being devoured by the grass and thickets of the steppe. The whole steppe was broken by these hills. Nature denied it brooks and springs, and it received only lakes, of both sweet and salt water. Those of salt water were deserted—despised even by the grass, but about the sweet water lakes birds swarmed and foliage flourished, making them like the temples of a beneficent Diety, where the steppe was worshipped.

When Antoni turned, with his escort, from the highway to the small road uniting the villages and farms, his soul became strangely gay. He felt stronger, and free as a bird. He was filled with energy and joy—the love of life and action returned to him. And he had plenty of hard work. They stopped at the villages to transact business. The peasants surrounded the wagon, testing the scythes and bargaining. They held a regular market day. They had to keep a sharp look-out for

counterfeit bank-notes, which circulated through the country in large quantities, and it was often necessary to take their pay in the products of Nature—salt, skins, and nuggets of gold, and sometimes to give credit, writing down the name of the purchaser so as to be able to find him on their return in the fall.

Having learned the value of his men, Antoni had divided among them what work there was to do. Chyz, a man of great experience, who during his twenty years of life in Siberia had manufactured salt, dug gold, sold skins, and traded with the Kirghizes, helped him in conducting transactions. Rudnicki was made overseer of the horses, wagons, and provisions. Stasiak prepared the camp, and Andukajtys was their cook and purchased the provisions. The peasants constituted their defence against tramps and Tartars. After a couple of weeks everything went smoothly, each one attended to his duties, and Antoni's attention to business and his kindness ruled the most independent amongst them. He seldom commanded, he found a simple request was enough, and so harmony reigned among these widely different people, gathered together from all nations. They went further and further into the steppe, toward the east and south, meeting the Kozak's mounted police,

who defended the land from invasion of the Kirghizes. They reached farms where the people dwelt as though on islands ; they visited villages whose inhabitants went to the city once a year—the day of the yarmark. Usually, they camped wherever night overtook them. At such times, they drove the wagons close together, tied the horses out to pasture, and searched for water. If they found no lake, they used the water they carried with them in barrels. They cooked their meal over a fire built of dried stems, and boiled the water for their tea in the samovar, lighting their pipes after the meal.

Then everyone, having fulfilled his duty, rested or occupied himself according to his taste. Some ate and drank, others crawled into the wagons and went to sleep, and others talked and laughed. Chyz amused them by relating stories he had gathered from all parts of Siberia. Grynia played on the balabajka the simple, monotonous Siberian melodies. Andukajtys ate in silence, or, though this was very seldom, sang sacred songs after he had finished his meal. Antoni looked after the camp and the people, and by moonlight made up his accounts ; he placed the bank-notes in a leather bag which he carried in his breast, the coins he kept in a large calfskin bag. Then he enjoyed himself

in his own way. He took his rifle and went out on the steppe. He was very fond of the beauties of Nature, of the tranquility and majesty of this great desert, and he loved the never-ending green sea of grass. Every day he discovered new charms, new surprises, and new riches.

When supper was ready Andukajtys called him by whistling, which was taken up by the echo and repeated to infinity. Then he came back to camp. He was courteous, but distant to his comrades. Only Andukajtys was at all familiar with him. So many months spent in one wagon! Under these circumstances, the most diffident must rid himself of all restraint. At noon, as they drove slowly along, the men drowsy with the heat, Andukajtys would light his pipe and chat, and soon Antoni learned why he had been sent to Siberia. His sentence was for six years. He related the story with much gusto, laughing meanwhile.

"It was on account of Kmita. He was a horse-thief—he stole perhaps a hundred horses. When he was caught he was sentenced to a long time in prison, but when his term was over, he began to steal again. This was too much for us, and we organized a court in the village, and passed the death sentence on him.

This was all very well—we wanted to kill him, but none wished to go after him. Finally we agreed to draw lots. We threw some white straws into a cap, and among them one black straw. I drew the black one. I set out, taking with me a bridle, and went after him. At length I came across him on the bank of a river. I sprang at his throat, and he put a knife into my side. Then I threw him to the earth, and he stabbed me in the leg."

Here he opened his mouth and showed his teeth like a wolf, laughing softly.

"I finally got the bridle round his neck, and he bit my arm like a wild horse. No matter, I bound it up, tied the reins around his neck, and put him in the river."

Here he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and, being always hungry, began to eat a piece of bread with relish.

"They found his body in the river, and tried to discover the murderer. Nobody suspected me. I lay in bed, waiting for my wounds to heal. But I took his knife as a keepsake, and my youngest brother found it, and took it out with him when he played in the street. Someone recognised it, and I was taken. When I got well, they sent me here—no matter, only I am lonesome for my mamma."

He spoke often about "mamma," and they joked him continually, calling him "a little orphan." He was very useful in the caravan. He cooked, purchased the provisions—he even did the washing, was as peaceful as a lamb and obeyed everyone. To look at him, none would believe that he was a murderer. He bore the marks of his fight, and was lame in one foot as the result of Kmita's stab; he had also lost one finger, which the thief had bitten off. He did not dislike his life in Siberia. Seeing the different people amused him, and the philosophy of the peasants helped him in his moments of misery. To be happy, he needed only a large quantity of bread. When he was not hungry, he did the work of three men, and when he was hungry, he slept.

In their wanderings they passed one night in a ravine, where was a solitary *futor* (a Siberian farmhouse). The farmer had chosen a good position. In front of his house was a small lake of fresh water, and not far distant a grove of birch trees. The house was surrounded by a deep ditch, around which was a barricade, surmounted by a strong fence of hawthorn wood.

Antoni's boys pitched their camp not far from the lake, and men and horses quenched

their thirst, then they built a fire. No one appeared from the futor, so they, on their part, did not make any haste to pay their neighbours a visit.

After supper, Antoni went out on the steppe as usual. The evening was lovely, and the cool breeze refreshing, after the hot day. At the least noise, tarbagans (a kind of kangaroo, with small, feathery tail,) sprang from the grass and ran away. In the bushes the partridges called their mates to sleep.

Antoni, humming, went toward the grove of birch trees, where he saw something white among the trees. Someone rose from the ground and stood still. Antoni got ready his rifle, but soon saw that it was a woman, picking strawberries. The earth was red with them, and her overturned basket told of her fright. Antoni spoke to her in a friendly way, and he also began to pick berries. The woman, reassured, approached him, and they looked at each other, first diffidently, out of the corners of their eyes, then boldly and straightforwardly.

The blood mounted to the boy's cheeks, for the girl was the prettiest he had ever seen. She was slender and beautifully proportioned; she seemed like a goddess of the virginal steppe. Her hair was a deep gold, and her

eyes grey-blue, like flax flowers. Her complexion was sun-kissed and warm with the blood of youth. Her sun-burned hands and bare feet were small and exquisitely formed, her lips were like coral. She did not look frightened, and gazed on him in curiosity, for she seldom saw strangers. She recommenced picking berries, and was the first to speak.

"Did you come to Shaman on business?"

"Then this is Shaman's futor?"

"Yes. He is at home."

"Are you his daughter?"

"No. He bought me at the yarmark."

"Where?"

"At Tobolsk. It was five years ago. My brother sold me to him for eight years."

"Why?"

"To be his servant. He gave thirty roubles for me. My brother told him he would buy me back when he had the money. He was a gold-smuggler; perhaps he was successful and his comrades killed him—I don't hear from him."

"What was your brother's name?"

"Franek Shyshko. I am Sophia Shyshko."

"Then you are not a Siberian?"

"No. I am from Poland. I was very small when my brother brought me here. Now I am eighteen."

"Do you like being here?"

"Very well. They respect me because I do my work well, and then they know I will not steal from them."

"Shaman has a wife?"

"No, a housekeeper."

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, gathered up her basket, and turned to go."

"Are you a hunter?" she asked.

"No; I am selling litowki."

"I am glad of that. I must buy one—it is time for mowing."

"Do you mow?"

"There is no one else to do it. Shaman is constantly away on the road, and the old woman watches the cows. I plough and mow, and the old people make butter and cheese."

She spoke of doing the ploughing and mowing as though it were a very natural thing. Tall and strong, she looked like a good workman. Her young chest rose and fell slowly, and her form indicated strength and flexibility, acquired by continual outdoor exercise. Her well-poised head had an air of wild freedom and energy. She looked at him again.

"What is your name?"

He told her, and she was thoughtful for a while.

"Then you are not a Siberian, either?"

"No, I am your brother."

She laughed, showing her splendid white teeth.

"Let us then converse in our own tongue. I have almost forgotten it. Come to the futor—I will give you something to eat."

"I am not alone. Ten of my men are camping near the lake."

At that moment he heard Andukajtys's whistle.

"They are calling me."

"I will see you again. I must buy a litowki."

"Let us go together. I must see Shaman, for we must be on the move to-morrow morning!"

He preferred looking at the girl to doing any business.

As they approached the farm, she stopped.

"Don't speak in our language in presence of Shaman. He doesn't like it."

They entered the yard, where several cows brought from the pasture were standing. Two people were milking them—they were Shaman and an old Siberian woman.

"Master," called the girl, "merchants selling scythes are camping near the lake."

"Why did you let them in?" came from the corner, in a voice which Antoni recognised.
"They will cut the grass and steal something."

"Pshaw!" laughed the girl. "Don't be afraid. Better buy me a scythe."

"And where is the old one?"

"You may mow with the old one, I can't. The merchant is here. Come and see him."

From behind the cows, Shaman, lame and bent, hobbled toward Antoni.

"How do you do, Antoni Stefanowich?" he said.

"Ah, you recognise me. And how do you know my father's name?"

"Someone told me. Come in, please. I have nothing—I am a poor man, but still I invite you to my miserable dwelling. Well, you are already selling scythes—you are fortunate."

"The scythes are not mine. Will you buy a couple?"

"I haven't a kopek."

"Then give me a rouble, if you have no kopeks."

"One rouble for a scythe! Great Lord! I pay much less in Tobolsk."

"I bring the scythe to your house. But there, do as you please. I will not insist."

They entered the house, which was plastered outside with loam, inside with felt. It looked like a big mole-hill, but there was plenty of room and light inside. In the windows, in place of glass, there were pieces of mica, and the

furniture was fairly comfortable. Antoni seated himself on a bench, his rifle in his hand. This man, notwithstanding his feeble appearance, frightened him, and filled him with diffidence. Looking at him, he could not rid himself of the impression that this was some enormous spider, watching for his prey.

"Will you bargain for a scythe?" he said, looking sidewise at the young man.

"How?"

"I will furnish you with milk. You have ten people, and they must drink a lot. Whose merchandise?"

"The doctor's, from Lebiaza."

It seemed to him that Shaman's face became more yellow.

"He does a good business, and is much respected by his people. That's good-luck! Another man dies a beggar, and he will leave a fortune!"

"Do you know him well?"

"I know him. He dragged me into court on account of some herbs I sold to the peasants. I was in prison two months, and they beat me with sticks. They don't strike him, although he is an exile like me. It's all good-luck!"

He said this quietly, but his hooked fingers picked nervously at hishalat. Antoni shivered,

thinking how false the man was. At that moment the girl entered the room, and instinctively he felt that no harm could come to him in her presence.

"I shut the door, but there is a man knocking at it. It must be one of yours," she said, turning toward Mrozowiecki. "I told him he needn't worry about you, but he doesn't believe me."

"Don't let him in," shouted the old man.

"I will go to him myself," said Antoni rising.

"Have you bought me a scythe? I am going to fetch it," said the girl.

"I didn't buy one, they are too dear. We can get along without it."

"Indeed? I told you to give the merchant a sable skin for it. I wonder why you keep so much money?"

"Be silent! I am a beggar. Who told you I had money!"

"Eh!" muttered the girl, "I don't talk when I know I ought not to, but this merchant is a countryman of mine, and he will not do us any harm. Well, give him the skin, and I will go and pick out a scythe. They are going early to-morrow morning."

She spoke quickly and with determination, but the old man did not move.

"Will you trust me? I will pay you in the autumn. You will be coming back this way when you return to Lebiaza."

"Very well ; but you will then have to pay one rouble and a half. Such are my orders, because we lose a great deal."

"He will pay," said the girl softly, "and if he will not, I will pay. Let us be going."

The old man remained silent, as a protest against these proceedings.

Antoni went out with the girl and said to her softly,

"It seems to me that I shall have to make you a present of a scythe. Well, so let it be. I will pay the doctor, and you shall thank me."

She looked at him with her clear eyes, but said nothing.

Andukajtys was rapping continuously at the door. On seeing the girl he ceased.

"Grazi margajte!" (how do you do,) he muttered in the Lithuanian language.

They went to the camp. Everyone was asleep excepting Chyz, who watched alone.

"Be careful in your dealings with Shaman," he said, "or he will steal your shirt. He is worse than a Kirghiz."

Antoni did not answer. He led the girl to

the wagon, where the scythes were, and picked out the best for her. Then they both turned in the direction of the farm. The night was almost as clear as day, and the steppe was quiet. They lowered their voices, and spoke in their own tongue. She spoke of her work and he of his long journey. Then she asked him about his people, and listened as though he told her some news, when he spoke of his country. When they reached the door, they stopped.

"I don't remember anything about our country. Strange! Quite a different country: Tell me how it is?" she said.

"There is not such a heavy winter, and there are plenty of people. The trees and flowers are different. In the villages there are churches, and the fields are cultivated. In the cities, the streets are paved, and the houses are of stone."

"And they all speak our language?"

"All."

She gazed into space, and whispered,

"I would like to see it!"

Then she asked suddenly,

"Do they sing there? Sing something for me—will you?"

He began to hum:

"I sow the wheat in the field,
But cannot reap it at all.
I was in love with a girl,
But her I could not win.
Because one sows, one may not reap.
Because one loves, one may not win.
Although she betrays me,
I will not curse her!"

"Lock the door, and loose the dogs!" called Shaman from the cabin.

The girl made an involuntary movement, as though she had been listening to unknown sounds. He took her hand,

"Good-bye," he whispered, "don't forget me. I shall never forget you. I will be back in the fall."

She turned toward him, and looked steadily into his eyes with a sorrowful gaze.

"It's too bad," she whispered.

"May the scythe serve you well, and while mowing, remember my song."

Suddenly he clasped her in his arms and kissed her lips.

The girl trembled and grew pale.

Once a hunter who passed the night on the farm had wished to kiss her. At that time she had been so angry and disgusted, that she wished to strangle the man with her strong

hands. Now the man who kissed her was a countryman. She did not strike him, nor did she call him a beast; she only pushed his face gently away from hers and retreated quietly to the door.

"Good-bye, Sophia," he whispered. "Remember me and keep well."

She locked the door and gave the dogs their liberty, but she did not go into the house. She leaned on the gate and looked toward the camp, where the fire, replenished from time to time, was burning brightly. She heard Grynja's balabajka, and when he stopped playing she heard the second verse of Antoni's song :

"The wheat grew up, but before harvest
It was destroyed by the hail;
And my love for the sweet girl
Was destroyed by evil words.
The wheat was destroyed by the hail
And I did not win the girl;
Although she betrays me,
I remember her with joy."

Next day no trace of the wanderers remained save only the trampled grass and dead ashes. They were lost in the steppe.

It was a brief episode, but a most important one in Antoni's life, and could he have foreseen the consequences, he would probably have

avoided Shaman's futor. But it was his destiny to pass through all the torments of hell.

Everything went satisfactory on his journey. Business was excellent, and the grass had already begun to blacken when he had sold his last scythe. He therefore sent home two empty telegas (wagons) and seven of the men. Grynja, Andukajtyś, and Rudnicki remained with him, and in their company he began his return trip, collecting the money for the scythes sold on credit. They took a zig-zag route, stopping here and there. There was no trouble with the collections—the Siberian people are honest and business-like. They paid promptly, and received Antoni and his companions hospitably. Although it was only the end of July, the nights were already cold, and sometimes the foliage was already falling. On this account they could not pass the nights on the steppe, which had its riches and life, but no shelter. The more delicate plants had already perished, but the hardier ones stood brown and bare, scattering their seeds and shedding their leaves. Of the snow-white tawoloshka nothing remained but the stems. The birds were silent, the tarbagans hid in their holes. It was as though sadness and fear seized on the heart of nature before the approaching winter.

But Antoni's heart was joyful. He was gay and happy. He laughed on the slightest provocation, whistled, sang, and played about like a boy. The expedition had been successful, and his leather bag was full of money. The horses and men were in good health, and his soul was filled with great joy.

When he thought of the young girl at the futor, his heart throbbed and his blood grew warmer, and something seemed to draw him to her, whispering to him during his sleeping hours, and accompanying him during the day—always, always! As they drew nearer the futor, he could hardly restrain his impatience—he wished to fly there.

Finally, the last intervening night passed. A white frost covered the earth, and their breath froze in the air. Antoni felt warm. One hundred versts separated them from the futor. These were passed at sunset, and Antoni saw Shaman's farm afar off and hurried the horses. They stopped before the carefully closed gate, and the boy jumped to the ground. He wished to call, but they had already been seen. The gate was opened and Sophia appeared. She was dressed in a tulub and long boots. About her head was tied a red kerchief. They gazed at each other and smiled joyfully.

"Come in right away! Shaman is not at home."

This was the acme of good-luck. The men drew the wagon into the yard, and Antoni and the girl entered the izba (room). The old witch peered at them with her gloomy eyes, half hidden beneath bushy eyebrows, and then quickly left the room.

Presently Andukajtys entered, and greeting the girl after his rough fashion, said,

"I want some bread!"

"I should prefer some tea with vodka," said Rudnicki, who came in behind him.

"It is very cold," announced Grynja, entering last.

He looked about the izba and spat on the floor.

"Devil and not man! There is not a Holy Image in the house."

This put him out of humour for the whole evening.

The young girl set the vodka on the table, prepared tea, brought bread, cedar nuts, and cold roast lamb, which she placed on the table.

"What a pretty girl," said Rudnicki.

"If she had dark eyes and hair, I would fall in love with her," added Andukajtys, chewing his bread.

She laughed, but said nothing. After a while

the old witch returned. She glanced at the abundantly spread table and trembled with indignation, but she said nothing, only whispering to the girl,

"I will serve the tea."

Antoni sat not far from the table, gazing on the girl. She seated herself beside him and they began to talk quietly.

Rudnicki elbowed Andukajtys.

"They are friends already," he whispered. The Zmudzin laughed softly and said,

"Let them be, if they enjoy it. I prefer the bread."

They ate everything on the table, then Andukajtys asked Antoni,

"Any work to do?"

"No," he answered, disturbed.

"Then I am going to sleep, because I have had enough."

"We also," said Rudnicki and Grynja.

The old woman lit an oil lamp, and beckoned to them to pass to the other side of the hall. The izba (room) remained in darkness. The young people drew closer to each other, and whispered softly, and still more softly. Then the old woman came back, placed the lamp on the table, poured out a glass of tea and invited Antoni to drink.

"It's true, you are hungry," exclaimed the girl.

"Not very—I can eat to-morrow, and God only knows when I shall see you again."

He rose, just the same, and drank the tea down without stopping.

"You will come again? It's only three hundred versts from here to Lebiaza."

"Certainly I will. I will buy a horse at once and come here every two weeks."

"I will ask the old man to allow me to go to mass. I have lived like a beast until now, but since to-day it will be different."

"Of course it will be different. In a year or so I will marry you—if only I can earn some money."

"That's only a trifle. Have we not strong arms? And will you take me to your country?"

"I will take you there, but it cannot be soon."

"We can wait," she answered courageously.

They chatted thus for some time, and Antoni drank another glass of tea. After a while he felt strangely tired, and grew very sleepy. His eyelids closed and his head drooped. The girl noticed this, and placed several sheepskins on the bench, brought a pillow, bade him good-night, and left him alone, taking the lamp with her. She did not notice that the old woman had been sitting behind the stove, watching

them. Antoni did not notice this either, he was so sleepy that, without undressing, he threw himself on the improvised bed and slept like a log.

Next morning, Andukajtys could hardly wake him. The telega (wagon) was ready, and the Zmudzin urged him to depart at once. Antoni felt as though he had been tipsy. His head ached and his legs felt like lead. The young girl gave him some tea and advised him to rest, but he was again seized with fear of this house and its inhabitants. Sophia accompanied him quite a distance, and then returned alone, having again received his promise to come to see her in a couple of weeks. Not until evening did Antoni feel better.

"You will have the fever," his comrades decided. It was their last night on the road, so they were in good spirits. Each one of them expected to find some news from his people awaiting him in Lebiaza. They counted their gains and spoke of taking a long rest, after the hard work of the summer. Antoni estimated that he had earned about one hundred roubles. He would buy a horse, and during the winter he would earn his living by driving, and be able to see the girl very often. They urged on the horses, and the telega sped over the frozen

ground. They began to meet people oftener. It was dusk, when, with a great noise and loud singing, they entered Lebiaza. Their acquaintances greeted them heartily. Tomoy recognised Antoni, and squealing continually accompanied him home.

Without knowing why, the boy shuddered violently as he opened the gate of the doctor's house. Was it joy, or uneasiness, or a presentiment?

Old Utowich rushed out first, and behind her came the doctor.

"Antoni, how are you? Everything well?"

"Thank God, we are all well," answered Mrozowiecki.

"Come in."

"In one minute. I will put the horses in the stable and fetch the copper."

After a while he went into the house. Ragged and dirty, with long unkempt hair, he looked like a brodiaha (tramp), as Shumski immediately remarked.

He entered the room, carrying the bags of copper, and threw them on the floor of the doctor's room. Then he removed the bag with paper money, from his neck, and placed it on the desk.

His eyes laughed with honest joy when he

looked on the familiar faces and furniture, and even Shumski appeared agreeable to him at that moment.

"And where is our priest?" he asked.

"He went away and got lost," answered the doctor gloomily.

"Poor man, he went to his parish."

"One madman less," said Shumski, "I am sure they murdered him to get his boots. He caused us much trouble, and we shall be obliged to wait for the wedding until we can get another priest."

"Then there is no more service on Sunday?"

"We read the prayers ourselves," said Panna Marya. "We cannot, however, have the sacrament administered to us."

"What a pity," muttered Antoni.

"What need have you for sacraments?" laughed Shumski. "Have you found a sweetheart on the steppe?"

The boy blushed and was silent.

Happily Rudnicki, the great gossip, was gone, Andukajtys was eating, and made no haste to tell of Shaman's futor. Only Panna Marya noticed the blush and his embarrassment, but she said nothing. After supper they went into the doctor's office. Antoni wished to retire.

"If you will allow me," he said, "I should like to reckon up with you to-night. I shall sleep better. Then I will go home as I expect to find a letter from my sister."

"Very well. Let us count up."

They poured out the copper and all began to count. He had received three thousand roubles' worth of merchandise. He presented the cost account.

"Very economically managed," said the doctor in praise.

Then they counted the salary of the escort, half of which had already been paid by Antoni, and the value of the raw products received in exchange.

"Very good! I see you will be a business man. They have not cheated you," said the doctor joyfully, weighing the nuggets of gold, while Panna Marya and Shumski examined the skins.

"I have fifteen hundred roubles in my bag," said Antoni proudly, taking out the bundles of bank-notes.

The doctor took the first package and began to count it. Suddenly he stopped, shook his head, looked at them carefully, took them to the light, and then dropped his hands.

Antoni looked at him.

"Where did you change this money?" asked the doctor.

"In different places—wherever we happened to be. Are they not good?"

"They are all counterfeit," muttered Gostynski. "Give me some more."

Antoni grew white. He handed the doctor another package. Shumski approached the table, examined the bills, and laughed sarcastically.

"Nobody but a blind man would take such bills. You can paper the walls of your bedroom with them."

But Antoni did not hear the sarcastic words. Ashy pale he was looking at the doctor, who did not count the second package, but only looked at it, threw it on the table, and said,

"Some more!"

It was the same thing over again. A deep silence reigned in the room. The doctor grew more gloomy, stretched out his hand for the money, took it, examined it, and threw it contemptuously aside. Antoni's forehead shone with cold perspiration. He emptied the bag and looked at it with glassy eyes. Panna Marya put the copper in the safe. Shumski hurriedly walked to the other side of the room. Finally the doctor laid the last two packages aside, and said,

"Only two hundred roubles are good, the others are counterfeit. You have done a splendid business."

"How can it be?" whispered Antoni.

"If you don't believe it, you can take them," said the doctor, pushing the pile of notes toward Antoni.

"I told you how it would be," said Shumski. "I told you to send Shyshka, but you had no confidence in my words." Then, turning to Antoni, he said, smiling,

"Well, sir, this is worth a little bit more than the few oxen, whose skins you brought this winter."

"I can see no joy or consolation in remembering the old losses," said Panna Marya. "Then you were guilty—to-day Pan Mrozowiecki is guilty. Anyone is liable to meet with a misfortune."

"It seems to me that I shall go crazy!" said Antoni. "I took this money in the presence of other people in broad daylight and I never was drunk. None of us saw anything suspicious."

"It's the best proof that you are idiots, and you are responsible for all of them."

"My Lord! My Lord!" whispered the boy, claspng his head in his hands.

The doctor rose, walked about the room several times, and then sat down again.

"Well, let us finish this beautiful account. Five hundred roubles in cash, the cost of the caravan is five hundred roubles, and this trash stands for thirteen hundred roubles, so there remains for me seven hundred roubles, out of which I must pay you for your work. Take your hundred and fifty roubles. I will pay the others to-morrow."

Antoni had risen.

"When misfortune seizes a man, he can do nothing to overcome it. I don't understand what has happened. I took good money, and if I was not cheated with the gold and skins, I don't see how they could cheat me with the notes. Only one thing is possible—someone has changed the money, although I swear before God Almighty that I never parted with the bag. You say that I am an idiot, and that I am responsible for all. Then don't slap me in the face with my earnings. You know well that I will not take the money. Have pity on me, and permit me by hard work to repay you for the loss. I will serve you until my death, and you shall pay me with that trash. Perhaps I shall be able to pay my debt before I die."

The doctor glanced at him.

The lad was almost weeping, losing control of himself with grief and disappointment. He saw himself humiliated, guilty, and powerless in the face of fortune that persecuted him so bitterly. He staggered and leaned against the wall.

"My Lord! My Lord!" he said again. "Why did I come here? Why?"

Panna Marya approached her father.

"Father, speak to him," she said softly; "if you repulse him we shall have his life on our hands and consciences. He is exhausted by one misfortune after another."

"I don't need your advice," growled the doctor, "only take that man Shumski away. He irritates me continually. It is evident that someone has stolen the lad's money. We must keep quiet about it. We shall discover it sooner or later."

The young girl called to Shumski. He began to talk, gesticulating excitedly.

"Such incidents as this prove my views. Father is too old for business. He is influenced by false sympathies. He takes idiots into his service. To-day a couple of thousands are lost—to-morrow it will be ten thousand, and soon his whole fortune will be gone. I would swear that this rascal, in partnership with Chyz or

the others, has stolen this money. It is impossible to be stupid enough to believe in his innocence. And it is evident that there is some woman in the case—but I will find out.”

Panna Marya listened to this tirade indifferently, and answered quietly,

“Everything will be discovered in time. As to the losses—we will bear them philosophically.”

Behind the closed doors, another conversation was going on. The old man put the money in the safe and called to Antoni.

“Come here. You must swear to me two things; first, that you will say no word about this adventure. This is necessary on account of my credit, and to aid in discovering the thief, because that money was stolen from you. Later on, perhaps you will remember something. You must also swear that from to-day you will obey me absolutely.”

“I swear it to you, sir.”

“I now take you into my service. You will come here to-morrow, and according to your wish I will pay you with the counterfeit money, except your necessary expenses. You will do what I tell you to do. How long it will be, we shall see—perhaps it will be for your whole life, as you said.”

“Very well, sir, my life is not worth much.”

"Everything is open before you. Remember then, that you belong to me. I will not permit any rebellion. You tried to be independent, and you see what came of it. Now you will obey me, and learn your work from A.B.C."

The young man assented by a movement of his head. At that moment nothing could move or frighten him—his misfortune had stunned him. He would have sold himself to the Kirghizes.

"Now, go and rest. I will tell Shumski to be silent about this, if it be possible."

The young man left the house like an automaton. He dared not look anyone in the face. Like a wounded animal he retreated to his den, and there made his moan. Now he was buried alive in Siberia, without the possibility of going back to his native country or rising from his misery.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHUMSKI was a braggart and an egotist, but an intelligent, energetic, and very polished one. Thrown without means on the Siberian soil, where hundreds like himself perished, he succeeded in a very short time in gaining a good position. Shyshkin disliked him, so he tried to win the old man's sons-in-law over to his side, and in this he succeeded. With the dissipated Smolin, he was dissipated ; with the sharper, Berezin, he was a sharper ; and he often astonished his friend by the daring he displayed in transacting crooked business, where everything depended on cheek. With the utmost daring and cheek, he gambled with and robbed the drunken Smolin, and covered his ignorance of his profession by a plentiful supply of words gathered from different handbooks and encyclopedias, deluging old Shyshkin with a flood of technical words, whenever any accident occurred at the distilleries. And in time he became acquainted with all the

secrets of the firm, and was its adviser in dangerous cases.

He had time for everything. To-day, he was in the distilleries; to-morrow, in the wholesale vodka houses; the day after he was in Lebiaza. He knew well how to speculate for his own benefit with old Shyshkin's money, always returning it in time. He could spend the night in dissipation, and work the next day as well as though he had slept. He could sing, play, and dance, and was the soul of every social gathering. He could adapt himself to any environment, he had no principle, no fancies, no bad humours. Everyone liked him, but he had not a single friend.

He ruled Smolin completely. Smolin was a feeble-minded man, and prosperity had turned his brain. Wealth had come to him suddenly, after long years of hard work and misery, and he had neither the strength nor the ability to keep it. Shumski shared in all his pleasures, and was, at the same time, tutor and companion. Their proceedings aroused the indignation of the whole village, but their social position was unassailable.

Shumski had a large income, and was lucky in all his undertakings. He would have been rich had it not been for his continual gambling.

The cards were changeful—what he won from Smolin, he lost to the other gamblers at the club. There a whole pack of gamblers made their living out of him. Consequently, he was sometimes seized with fits of rage and despair, and would count the days and even the hours that must elapse ere he could leave Siberia.

His antipathy for Mrozowiecki was great. He hated him from the first moment they met, and every day he despised him more and more. He was to him, not only a foe, but a rival—a rival with Shyshkin and with the Gostynski—and especially with the latter, over whom he wished to rule, but could not. Antoni's ill-success filled him with delight, but it did not satisfy him—not at all.

Despite his misfortune, the boy was not lost. He served the doctor, became his friend, and a member of his family. The ground was slipping from beneath Shumski's feet at Lebiaza. And when mechanical difficulties arose at the distilleries, Shyshkin would say, with the simplicity of an executioner,

"No matter! If you can't do it, I'll send to the doctor, and ask him to lend me his engineer. He has only to look at it, and he knows at once what to do."

At such times, Shumski would turn green

with rage, and swear vengeance in his soul. But one day Mrs. Smolin added fuel to flame.

"The doctor's clerk was here to-day," said she, addressing Shumski. "He's a very nice-looking boy, and so good and thoughtful. Panna Marya will be stupid if she does not change."

These words drove Shumski straight to Lebiaza. It was dusk when he arrived, and the family were gathered in the doctor's room. The doctor was playing whist with three old men of the village. Utowich had just replenished the fire, and Andukajtys was silently watching the blaze, and crumbling some old stale bread; Mrozowiecki played the violin, and Marya listened, her head resting against the wall.

His entrance disturbed them. Utowich hastened to prepare supper, Andukajtys muttered something about wood for the fire, Antoni laid aside his violin. Marya alone did not move. Shumski greeted the company, exchanged a few witty words with the whist-players, and then approached his fiancée.

"I have interrupted a pleasant entertainment," said he sarcastically.

"Not at all. We can continue."

"And if I object?"

"We will consult your taste. From whence does God lead you?"

"From Kurhan. This is the first time in my life that I have seen you doing nothing, and dreaming."

A movement of the eyebrows was her only answer.

Mrozowiecki left the room, not wishing to intrude. Shumski followed him with his eyes.

"I was told to-day, in Kurhan, that he had replaced me, with you," he said suddenly.

"Who told you? Mrs. Smolin?"

"You guess well."

"It is not difficult to guess. One recognises the author by his style. What more did she say?"

"Nothing. That was enough for me."

"She was very kind not to say anything more."

"Then you affirm this?" he asked sharply.

"I?" replied she just as sharply. "You know if it were so, I should be the first to tell you."

"You have no right to speak or act as you do."

"Nor have you, and——"

"Then you believe the stories that man tells of me?"

"Pan Mrozowiecki has never said a word to me about you; it would be superfluous."

Having said this, she rose and left him.

Shumski felt this splendid marriage was slipping from his grasp, and determined to be more careful in future. The guests departed, and he ate the supper that had been prepared for him.

"Boys," called the doctor, "go to bed. At daybreak Andukajtys will go to Gladianka for grain, and you, Antoni, will distribute the whiskey among the dram-shops."

Both were sitting near the stove, and answered together,

"Very well."

After a while Mrozowiecki elbowed the Zmudzin.

"Will you exchange with me?" he said in a whisper.

Andukajtys opened his wolf-like jaw, and laughed in his lazy fashion.

"You wish to go to the futor," he answered, also in a low voice. "Very well. I will exchange."

Shumski heard the whisper and remembered it.

Next day Antoni went after the grain. Coming back, he went ahead of the wagon and turned into the steppe to Shaman's farm, and only toward evening he met the driver near Lebiaza. He did this often—every time his road lay in

that direction—without arousing any suspicion. This evening he was in gay spirits on entering the house. He was surprised to see Shumski.

“Why so late?” asked the doctor.

Antoni noticed that everyone looked at him inquisitively. Even Panna Marya raised her eyes from her book.

“I did not think I was longer than usual,” he answered.

“Why did you exchange with Andukajtys?”

“I thought it was immaterial to you.”

“Well, yes. Did you not stop anywhere?”

The boy hesitated a while. He wished to tell the truth, but he feared that the doctor would forbid his visits to the futor, so he muttered, “No, sir,” and blushed for shame.

Shumski laughed triumphantly.

“Why make such a secret of your visit to Shaman? It’s natural that one should remember his own business. One must see his partner and ask him what per cent. thirteen hundred roubles bring, and then about his daughter’s health. Time flies agreeably at the fire-place of the family. Ha! ha! ha!”

Mrozowiecki dropped his eyes before the stern looks of the doctor and his daughter, but he could not bear the insult and irony.

“It is none of your business,” he said, pale

with anger. "I have the right to have acquaintances, provided I do not neglect my duties. If I had stolen the money I should not work to pay it back, but should lead as high a life as you do."

If Shumski had not been there, perhaps he had not lied, and would not have been angry. By becoming angry he made his position worse.

"Then you went to see Shaman?" asked the doctor, drumming on the table with his fingers.

"Yes, sir," he answered laconically.

"Do you go there often?"

"As often as I can."

"You have a sweetheart there?"

This inquiry and Shumski's ironical laughter irritated him more and more.

"I have," he answered boldly.

Not another word was spoken to him the whole evening. Shumski whispered ostentatiously to the doctor, Utowich sighed, and Panna Marya would not look at him. He was as though in a pillory. He did not touch any supper, but road-weary and hungry he went to his room—the room which formerly belonged to his friend. He was so irritated that his teeth chattered, as though in a paroxysm of fever, and spots flew before his eyes. He could not keep still, and walked the room like a wild beast in its cage.

It was very late when Andukajtys entered.

Antoni stopped his walking.

"Shumski has made a thief of me!" he muttered. "You have heard?"

"Yes. He has persuaded them, and they do not doubt it any more."

"A snake!" muttered the boy. "I will repay him some time."

"He is not fit to live," affirmed the Zmudzin. He sat down in the corner and was silent for a while. Then he said,

"I think I will escape from here. The old aunt looks in my mouth as though she would like to say I am eating too much. I will wait until the end of the winter, and then go."

"Where?" asked Antoni.

"To dig gold. Last fall a man came here from the mines, and he could not spend what he brought with him."

"Who is he?"

"A red-headed Shyshko. Have you not seen him in Kurhan?"

"Shyshko? Frank?" asked Antoni, rising suddenly.

"Maybe."

"He must be my girl's brother."

"Are you going with me to dig gold?" asked Andukajtys.

"Are you joking? I am a slave here. And then I can't dig gold, my luck is too bad. Let us get out of here. I am choking. Let's go to a dram-shop."

They went out, but the Zmudzin smelt fresh bread in the kitchen, which delighted him so that he stayed at home.

Toward morning Antoni returned, still irritated, gloomy, and rebellious. From that day on there was cold, mute war between him and the doctor's family. He spoke to no one except when business matters made it necessary, and they ceased to consider him a member of the family. He fulfilled all orders strictly, but regarded himself simply as a servant. After work he disappeared from the house, and wandered about all the evening and all night. On holidays he did not appear at all. He ate with visible constraint, and often lived for days on a piece of bread. He mended his clothes and washed his linen. In that way he needed almost nothing from the doctor.

Shumski never met him in Lebiaza, and although the doctor and Panna Marya never complained of him, he understood that he had crushed his rival for ever.

A couple of months passed in this way. Antoni was so low-spirited that he had no

desire to go even to the futor. At length, one day, escorting a herd of cattle to a distillery, he went to Shaman's little fortress. It was half covered with snow, as usual, and looked completely deserted. He knocked for a long time, and finally the owner himself opened the door, and said, without inviting him to enter,

"You came to see the girl? Go your way and search for her elsewhere. She has left me."

"Where is she?" shouted Antoni.

"Her brother bought her back, and took her. Such was the agreement."

"How long since?"

"A couple of weeks. I don't care—in six months I shall get her cheaper. He needs her now. She is nearer to you—she is in Kurhan. Good-bye," and he closed the door in Antoni's face.

Antoni sprang into his sleigh and galloped off. He passed the herd, and did not even stop in Lebiaza—he rushed on to Kurhan. He easily found Shyshko's house. It was situated on the Tobol, and brilliantly lighted. On entering Mrozowiecki found all the gamblers busily at "work." Heaps of bank-notes and gold covered the tables, and the faces of the gamblers were wild—drunk with alcohol and passion.

Mrozowiecki inquired for the host.

He sat at the same table with Shumski, gambling passionately—half-demented.

Antoni introduced himself to him.

"I am very glad to see you," muttered the red-headed rascal, with the face of a bandit. "You wish to play? Pray be seated. I respect all people who are able to pay cash, drink well, and gamble for three days and nights. Sit down."

"Thank you. I wish to see your sister," said Antoni, looking at him disdainfully.

"My sister? You must ask Pan Shumski for her. I have promised her to him."

Antoni turned to Shumski.

"Are you going to marry Panna Shyshko?"

"Is that any of your business?"

"Very much so, for I wish to marry her myself."

"You!" exclaimed Shumski, with an oath and an insolent laugh.

This was too much for Antoni, he raised his arm and struck Shumski in the face with his clenched fist.

Shumski quivered, and fell from his chair, but soon was on his feet again, and, seizing a heavy candlestick from the table, he threw it at his assailant. Antoni jumped aside and avoided

the missile. Shumski sprang at his throat, and then began a regular dram-shop fight.

A few gamblers sitting near by stopped playing to look at them, but soon resumed their play. The others paid no attention at all. There were so many fights in the place over cheating, counterfeit money, and marked cards.

Shyshko stared at the two fighting men with bloodshot eyes, whistling through his teeth. Then he took the chalk, changed the figures in the accounts, and took a handful of Shumski's money, putting it in his own pocket. Finally he rose and staggered to a table on which were several bottles of whiskey.

At that moment Shumski fell groaning to the floor.

Mrozowiecki looked around the place, spat, and went out.

In a few moments he became tranquil, and recovered his usual clear judgment. All his love for the girl seemed to have left him; the hideous environment which he had just left filled him with disgust. He entered the sleigh and drove off quickly. Only now he remembered his duty, the oxen, and the doctor's dissatisfaction, and he drove his horses at full speed until he reached the herd. He overtook it, and for the first time since the summer he felt free and

happy. He turned the cattle over to the overseers of the distilleries, and in three days he returned to Lebiaza.

Entering the house he encountered gloomy faces. Utowich was even crying. They looked at him as though they had not expected him back.

This froze him again, and he became gloomy and silent.

After supper the doctor called Mrozowiecki into his office, and locked the door. The boy shivered as though with ague.

"You know Shumski is in bed very ill?" said the doctor. "I went to take care of him. He is badly hurt. Did you wish to kill him?"

"He has already killed me," muttered Antoni. "Even had I taken his life it would not compensate me for the wrongs I have endured."

"You are mistaken. The truth does not need such proofs. And then, you did not care for the wrongs, but for the girl. Now we must part. After this scandal I cannot keep you any longer. It would be a great insult to the man who is to be my son-in-law."

"But how shall I be able to pay you my debt? You must not do me this wrong," said Mrozowiecki.

"It is your own fault. You have exhausted

my patience. Now you may go. I do not care for your debt."

The boy drew himself up proudly.

"It shall be as you wish. You have no pity on me, and I shall go from here stripped of everything. But the truth does not perish, and the time will come when you will regret this moment. I have been trampled on by all kinds of misfortunes, and can defend myself no longer. Good-bye!"

And so for the second time he left this house. This time he went out boldly.

He went to the kitchen where Panna Marya was alone. He was surprised on looking at her to see there was no anger in her face.

"So that man has finally succeeded in ousting you?" said she. "Don't be angry with my father. He was obliged to act in this way. You should not let yourself be carried away by anger. They were not sober, and you were irritated by the loss of your sweetheart. You will find her again."

"I shall not search for her. She seems never to have existed for me."

"And for me Shumski seems never to have existed. I have notified him of that fact by letter."

"Have you parted with him?"

"Yes. Are you surprised? My father is

indignant with you—I with him. Where are you going now?”

Instead of answering he looked at her in surprise that someone should take the trouble to inquire what was to become of him.

“Have you then never thought that I am a thief?” he asked.

“I thought they had stolen the money from you, and I am sure Shaman has done it through the girl. You did not act wisely, and I shall never forgive you for those few months of anger. You have not rewarded my father for his kind heart.”

“Shaman has stolen the money,” he muttered, struck with the thought.

“The truth will come to light. That cheat will be punished some time. In the meantime you had best follow my advice. Don’t go to Andryanek, nor anywhere, but to old Marcinowa Siwicka, who lives alone, with nobody to take care of her. She was here to-day, complaining about her hard lot, and I promised to send you there.”

The boy seized her hand and kissed it silently.

“Why are you thanking me? This is no favour.”

“I thank you for your kindness. I am not

accustomed to it, so I am thankful. I have all along supposed that you, with the others, were thinking ill of me, and now I see that you even care what becomes of me."

She smiled.

"It's only right. Life has not caressed me either. I am very sorry for you. Now, in farewell, I beg of you to forget all the evil I have done you, and remember only the good moments. I hope I shall see you again."

She shook hands with him, and he went into the hall.

She called him back again.

"Take this bundle with you for Marcinowa, and greet her for me."

She gave him quite a large package, and held back Tomoy, who wished to go with him.

From light and warmth the unfortunate boy went forth into the darkness and cold, but he was so accustomed to his unfortunate lot, that he did not despair any longer. He passed slowly down the street, and knocked at the door of another house.

An old woman opened it. It was hardly warmer in the house than out of doors, and not much lighter either.

"Panna Marya sent me to you," he said simply, feeling that this time he did not ask a

favour, with a spirit broken by too close an acquaintance with misery.

"Thank God, you have come!" answered the woman. "Maybe you will chop some wood for me, and fetch me something to eat? For that I will wash your linen, mend your clothing, and prepare the meals. I can't pay you anything, remember, so you mustn't even think of it."

"I know it. Panna Marya told me that. Here is a package from her."

"How kind she is. Let me look at my package. Well, well, some lard, some flour, some tea and sugar. My Lord, if I had some wood, I should have something for my supper. But I haven't any wood," and she sighed.

"Have you a hatchet? I will go to the neighbour—he will let me have some wood."

"You want a hatchet? Well, I haven't got it. I gather branches in the wood."

"Then perhaps you haven't a kettle either?"

"And what kind of a housekeeper should I be without a kettle? I have two."

He began to laugh. With this misery he felt at home. He looked around the room.

"Is this your house?" he asked.

"Mine. My late husband left it to me. He was a shoemaker from Warsaw. And he wasn't a drunkard—I promise you that."

"You have a rifle?" he said, taking an old rusty gun from the wall.

"For heaven's sake," she screamed, "let it alone! It might go off!"

"How? It isn't loaded."

"No matter. It's not difficult for an accident, even with an unloaded gun. It might cause death."

"It will give us bread and butter, and not death. With any rifle I can earn my living," he exclaimed joyfully. "I will bring you some wood right away."

"Wait, wait! I have no water."

"Give me a pitcher, and I will bring you some water."

"One can see that you come from rich people. A pitcher! I fetch the water in a pot."

"Let it be a pot," he laughed.

Going to a neighbouring peasant's for some wood, he thought of Panna Marya with gratitude. He liked his new situation, and he felt that he would be satisfied. In an hour a bright fire shone in the stove, the water was boiling, and the old woman trotted joyfully about.

"People passing in the street will wonder at the feast in my house," she said. "Well, old Marcinowa will not be hungry to-day. She will be warm to-day! May God give good

health to Panna Marya. She let me have her boy."

"You are talking nonsense," growled Antoni, who was cleaning the rifle.

"Well, they say you will marry her as soon as she gets rid of that yellow-headed man. That's why they sent you away for a while until everything is straightened out, and a priest comes. You can't hide anything from me. I know the girl likes you—I have known it for a long time, and when I told her, she did not deny it. Only that yellow-headed man was in her way. Therefore she is silent, and you are silent. Well, it is necessary for a certain length of time."

"Are you drunk?" exclaimed Antoni indignantly.

"I am not drunk at all, but what I see, I see. I go to the store every day for a chat. Sometimes I even buy something. There I heard her give orders to the cook. 'Keep warm the dinner for Pan Antoni,' and when you were sometimes late, she at once became uneasy, and looked for you through the window. To-day she came to me, and said, 'Mother, take our boarder into your house. He will take good care of you, and in return you will look after the poor boy. He must leave us, and it would be too bad to

let him go to strangers.' I said then, 'My golden one, I will take good care of your boy. You shall take him as though from his mother's house when the time comes.'"

"And I am sure she told you that you are a lunatic," said Antoni, without raising his head.

"She never takes a crooked way about things. She said nothing, but only blushed a little, exactly as you do now."

Antoni shrugged his shoulders and was silent. The old woman served supper.

"Oh!" said she, "I have not eaten anything warm for one week. It smells good."

He watched her, and felt a sincere pity for the old woman, and a desire to provide for her a warm meal every day. She became red while eating, and her grey eyes shone with delight.

"Now I am not hungry," she said at last, laying aside her spoon.

Antoni did not eat, but continued to clean the rifle. Then he unpacked his bundle, and prepared himself for a long winter sojourn in that house. He fell asleep while the old woman was saying her prayers.

A couple of weeks later, old Marcinowa rushed into the store. With a very proud and solemn manner she called for a brick of tea, two pounds of sugar, and a package of tobacco. She was

not talkative, and waited to be questioned. Having received what she asked for, she paid cash, and having counted her capital, she asked for some muslin and thread.

Panna Marya, while serving her, noticed her behaviour, and smiled slightly.

"Well, mother, I see you have had a legacy," she said.

"I don't need any legacy," answered the old woman proudly. "We have plenty of everything. Three cords of wood in the barn, bread in the cupboard, and meat in the pot. We live well."

The girl laughed still more.

"If Pan Antoni is not very busy, perhaps he will go to distribute vodka for me, as Andukajtys is sick," she said.

"No," said Marcinowa. "In the first place he is going to-morrow with me to Kurhan. We have plenty of skins for sale, and we are going to buy some things for the house. Then, is he some vagabond, to serve as a driver with somebody else's horses? Finally, I will not let him go in such cold weather. I am afraid he will get sick."

"Why don't you let him at least come on Sundays for prayers?"

"Oh, I should be ashamed to let him go

among other people with ragged clothing. When he is decently dressed he will come."

"But you let him go to the dram-shop every day," said the young girl, in order to irritate the old woman.

Marcinowa grew red.

"It's not true. It's only bad gossip. He comes in very late from the steppe, and before he fixes the skins it is already night. He does not go out at all. Oho! such an educated gentleman—what should he do in a bar-room?"

Panna Marya measured the cotton.

Marcinowa paid for it, and hastened home.

In the evening Antoni walked over to the doctor's store to buy some shot. A feeling of terror seized him as he reached the gate, and he longed to turn back, but overcoming this sensation, he entered.

Panna Marya had not expected to see him, and her astonishment was visible on her face. He stood on one side waiting his turn to be served. The store was full of people. At length he approached the counter, and placing some silver money on it, asked for some shot without raising his eyes. His embarrassment seemed to communicate itself to her, for she did not utter a word.

He took the package and turned to go. He

raised his eyes as he did so, intending to say good-bye, but, meeting her glance, he blushed, and was silent. She smiled at him, but likewise did not speak, and he departed.

At that moment both remembered the night when she had found him on the steppe, and, though no word had been spoken between them, they felt they had been drawn nearer to each other.

CHAPTER IX.

THE first of June Shumski's contract expired. He sent off his baggage about the middle of May, and during the last two weeks paid visits, and adjusted various small affairs. In the evenings he played cards at the club. But his good fortune had deserted him, and he lost every day, yet, despite this, he always returned to the green tables. He was also seen entering Smolin's house every second day. He and Smolin were then closeted together in the latter's office, and when they left it both were much excited. For some time Smolin had appeared very gloomy, as though he were afraid of something. Their caravans had already gone into the steppe, but he and Berezin still lingered. Did they wish to accompany their partner and able assistant to Tobolsk?

Saturday, two days before the time fixed for Shumski's departure, that worthy had a talk with Smolin, after which, he went directly to see Shyshko.

"I am going away the day after to-morrow," said he.

"Pity I haven't got all your money," rejoined his gambling companion, laughing cynically.

"Oho! You think I am going away poor? I can assure you my pocket-book is pretty well loaded. Mrozowiecki takes my place with Shyshkin."

"He will take your place at Lebiaza. They are only waiting for your departure. You took my sister from him, and now he will marry Panna Marya."

Shumski made no reply to this, but went out, slamming the door behind him.

At noon Berezin gave orders for his troyka to be got ready. He drove it himself, and went to Smolin's house.

"Let us go to the bath-house," said he to his brother-in-law.

Smolin entered the troyka and they set off.

Outside the city they looked at each other, and shook their heads.

"He is a mad dog," muttered Berezin.

"He will make trouble. We must pay him," whispered Smolin.

"I will settle him. Had he any sense he would say, 'Give me something. We worked together.' It would be right. We would give him a couple of thousand."

"He wants twenty. He threatens! What a pity we trusted him with everything!"

"It was unavoidable. He disposed of the counterfeit money very quickly. He discovered for himself the merchant drowned in the lard. At the time he told me he had put him, with the barrel, beneath the ice on the Tobol. Now, he says, he put him somewhere else, so as to have the proof handy. It may be so. He is a sharper!"

"I would give him twenty thousand to have peace. When he leaves here everything will be right."

"I will not give him a single cent, and you will see, he will keep silent just the same."

"Don't talk like that."

"I don't care. What have you said to him?"

"I promised to give him the money tomorrow."

"Where?"

"At his house. That was what he wished."

"It's all the same. I will go to-night. You must be ready on the Tobol with a boat, and you must wait there."

Here Berezin turned the horse's head towards home, and they went to the bath-house as they had said.

The day passed as usual. Owing to the intense heat, the people hid in their houses, and all the streets of the city were empty. The Tobol looked as though dead.

Having now nothing more to do, Shumski went out for a stroll. He was certain Smolin would keep his promise, and he felt that he had both him and Berezin in his clutches. He was not afraid of their assaulting him in broad daylight and among the people, and, for safety's sake, he intended to spend the night at the club. He felt no remorse for what he had done, for to his way of thinking it was purely a business transaction. But the time of waiting seemed to him very long, much longer than he cared to think of. Towards evening, whilst walking through one of the deserted streets, he met old Shaman.

"Have you any gold?" he asked.

The fortune-teller looked at him attentively.

"I have some," he whispered.

"Come to my house—perhaps I will buy if it is good. You can't cheat me as you did Mrozowiecki."

Shaman wrapped himself closely in hishalat.

"What Mrozowiecki? I don't know him."

"Don't take me for a fool. You robbed him of the good money, and gave him paper of

your own make. You did it cleverly. I should like to tell him that before my departure! But if you give me good gold, and sell it cheap, maybe I won't tell him anything."

"I will give it to you," whispered Shaman; "but I am afraid to go to your house, and then, I left the bag in my wagon."

"Where is your wagon?"

"In the steppe, hidden among the bushes."

"Go and get it—I will wait for you here."

"I am afraid. I am spied upon. If you don't buy another will. I will wait until night," said Shaman, retreating.

"To the deuce with you! Take me to the place," said Shumski, looking at the sun. "There's plenty of time yet."

"We mustn't go together," said Shaman, looking carefully around. "Watch my hat among the grass. It's not far."

He walked quickly, and once beyond the city, turned and disappeared among the bushes. Only his pointed hat could be seen. Shumski followed it, but without leaving the highway. All at once a few people appeared in front of him, and on coming nearer he found them to be Andryanek, Rudnicki, Karchewski, and Mrozo-wiecki. They carried wolves which they had killed. Antoni walked last, carrying a bunch of

skins and a rifle on his shoulder. Mrozowiecki did not say a word as they met.

"Well, don't you recognise your acquaintances?" said Shumski. "You have become very proud now."

He stopped Antoni in the road, evidently trying to pick a quarrel with him. The hunters passed them, and Rudnicki laughed.

"They will fight for a farewell!" said he.

Andryanek looked back. They stood opposite each other—then they turned aside and were hidden by the bushes. This was the last they saw of Shumski.

In the evening he was not at the club, and Shyshko did not find him at home. Towards evening Berezin asked the gamblers about him, but they had not seen him.

In the morning one and another asked for him, and toward noon it began to be whispered that he had departed during the night without paying his bills.

Andryanek also wondered where Mrozowiecki was, for he did not pass the night at the inn where they stopped, and nobody had seen him on the square of the market place. Toward evening he saw the doctor's troyka from Lebiaza, and said to Andukajtys, who was driving it,

"Are you alone?"

"Yes. I brought some butter."

"Then we will return together."

"As you say," muttered the Zmudzin.

With others they went homeward. Andryanek was now very anxious about Mrozowiecki.

"He disappeared like the fog," he said to Andukajtys.

"Who?"

"Antoni Stanislovovich."

"I saw him this morning."

"Where?"

"On the steppe. I even spoke to him. He told me that he had sold the skins and was going home. He had already killed half a dozen partridges."

"Did he tell you how he and Shumski parted yesterday?"

"Not a word. Did they meet?"

"Yes, they did, and Shumski stopped him."

Andukajtys laughed, and pointed to the right with his whip.

"I met Antoni here," he said.

Near the spot was a ravine, over which hovered several hawks. Andryanek looked at them with the eye of a hunter.

"There must be some carrion," he decided.

He took aim at one of the birds. Andukajtys reined in his horses as the shot sped away.

The hawk which it wounded began to use its wings, and fell into the bushes. Andryanek, laughing like a child, jumped from the telega, and rushed after the bird. Soon his pink blouse disappeared in the thicket.

Andukajtys stretched himself out on the hay, awaiting his friend's return. All at once he heard Andryanek's voice coming from the ravine. He screamed:

"Zmud! Zmud! Come here quick!"

A few telegas reached them, and people began to call to each other. Andukajtys jumped up also, and they rushed to the bushes.

"What is the matter?" they asked.

"God be with us!" shouted Andryanek. "Someone has committed murder. The corpse is here."

The thicket opened beneath the pressure of the curious people pressing around Andryanek, who stood not far from the corpse, as though he were afraid to touch it. Beside the corpse lay the dead hawk, staining with his blood the white flowers of the tawoloshka.

For a while nobody spoke. The dead man lay on his face, as though he had been shoved into the thicket. The corpse was covered with grass. Only an accident, such as had happened, could have led to its discovery.

Andryanek approached first, and turned the corpse over. They recognised him by his yellow beard and eyeglasses.

"Shumski!" was whispered from one to the other.

Andryanek and the Zmudzin looked at each other, arriving at a mutual understanding without speaking a word. The others began to look at the dead man. Evidently he had been strangled. There were no signs that any defence had been made. The assassin had attacked him unaware, and strangled him like a tiger. The murder had not been committed there. The dead man had been dragged there, and left as a prey for the hawks, foxes, and vermin. The steppe devours everything very rapidly. If a Kirghiz finds a dead man, he takes his boots and clothing, the birds pick out his brain and eyes, and the foxes clean his bones during the night, and after a week even the bones are covered with grass. That is the way in which tramps, escaped criminals, lost hunters, and the like, usually perish; but Shumski did not expect to perish like a beast or a social outcast. His mouth was convulsed and his eyes wide open; his face was blue and swollen. The appearance of the corpse was so horrid that the peasants turned away and spat.

Finally, Andryanek took off his cap, and made the sign of the cross several times. Then he nodded to Andukajtyś. They took up the corpse and carried it to the wagon. They drove off, followed by the others, in the direction of Kurhan. The frightened hawks disappeared in the sky. Then they returned, flying nearer the earth, searching for their prey. The bolder ones touched the tawoloshka bushes with their breasts, and then rose again. They circled about the place for a while, but finally convinced that they had been cheated of their feast, they flew away. The ravine at once became re-animated. The rabbits and tarbagans came out of their hiding-places, and the partridges and galanduks called to each other, running and flying about as usual. Everything returned to its usual order.

Three days later, three post wagons stopped before Marcinowa's house, and people flocked there from all sides. The poor old woman was half dead with fright on seeing the police, who filled her izba.

"Antoni Mrozowiecki lives here?" asked the horodnichy* of Kurhan.

"Yes, sir, but he is not at home. He is on the steppe with his gun."

* Police officer.

"Let me see his clothes. Open his trunk also. We must make a search."

"Jesus! Mary! What for—what have we done?"

The official did not answer; he searched everything and everywhere, but found nothing but misery and order—nothing suspicious. Marcynowa went from one to the other, kissing their hands, questioning, begging. None would give her an explanation.

The whole village was in the street and in the courtyard. Finally Doctor Gostynski came in, and the poor old woman went to him as to her saviour.

"My father, benefactor! What is the matter? What do they want with my Antoni?"

"Well, everything points to him as the murderer of Shumski."

"Jesus! Antoni killed the red-head! Great Lord! who says so? He went out to-day very late. He will be back soon."

"Be quiet," someone said to her.

"I will not. What? Can I not defend him? They want to wrong my boy, and am I to let them do it? I shan't. He a murderer! You are murderers yourselves! My Lord! My Lord!" and she began to cry aloud. They wished to carry her off, but she defended herself like a

fury, and they could not, so they let her alone.

All at once they began to whisper. Antoni entered the izba.

"What is the matter here?" he asked, in the greatest surprise.

"Oh, Jesus!" screamed Marcinowa. "They dare to accuse you of killing the red-head. Do you hear that?"

Mrozowiecki became deadly pale, and looked at the people with frightened eyes.

"I kill Shumski?" he repeated. "He pursues me even after his death. My God, it will never finish then."

He dropped his hands, and for a moment remained motionless. Then, as though awakening from a dream, he passed his hand over his forehead, and asked,

"And where is my accuser? Who saw me kill him?"

"Come here and answer," said the horodnichy. "What were you doing last Saturday and Saturday night?"

"Last Saturday we were hunting. There were four of us. We killed two wolves, and towards evening went to Kurhan. I carried the skins there for sale."

"Not far from the town you met Shumski.

You remained with him, and from that time no one saw you for several hours. What were you doing?"

"I remained with Shumski because he stopped me. We talked about ten minutes."

"Did you quarrel?"

"Yes. We always quarrelled."

"About what were you talking?"

Antoni grew red.

"I cannot repeat it. But seeing he wished to provoke me, I left him, and he disappeared in the bushes. I went direct to Shyshko, who had ordered some skins of me, and, as the night was bright, and I intended to hunt on the way home, I did not go to the inn, but returned."

"Yes. In the morning Andukajtys met you. Do you remember what you were talking about?"

"I remember. He said, 'I understand that Shumski is going away to-day.' I answered, 'It will be difficult on account of his different entanglements.'"

"Yes, it is difficult for a dead man to go away," muttered the horodnichy.

Antoni sighed profoundly. The blow was so sudden and unexpected that he was practically senseless. He answered like an automaton. He was not sure that it was not all a nightmare—a dreadful dream.

"Why should I kill him?" he said. "Had I wished to kill him I would have done it when he was wronging me every day. He was going away, and therefore could not wrong me any more. I had no interest in his death."

"Then you claim you are not guilty?"

"Why should I say that I am guilty? I left him in good health. Now, for the first time, I hear that he is dead."

"You make the matter worse by denying it. It is very simple. You quarrelled and it ended in a fight. It was not the first fight between you. During the fight you strangled him, and then took the corpse on your shoulders and hid it in the thicket. Everyone knows that you thad each other, and several times you threatened him. Get ready. You must go to Tobolsk. Everything is against you."

Marcinowa yelled like a wild beast.

"Why do you take him? Who saw him kill the other? God's thunderbolt will strike you! I will not give him up—I will not let you take him. Prove that he is guilty. Drag an innocent man into your rotten prison. Is there no plague for you? Antoni, speak! Why do you stand there like a tree? Bring witnesses."

Mrozowiecki went slowly across the room and hung the rifle, which, until now, he had held in

his hands, on the wall. Then he raised his eyes to the two peasants who approached him. One of them was Andryanek.

"Will you take me?" he asked sadly.

The friendly hunter nodded.

"Are we going immediately?"

"Without any delay. Such is the order."

"I am ready then."

The horodnichy had already gone out, and the people began to scatter, having satisfied their curiosity.

Marcinowa cried incessantly. Only now the doctor approached the guards.

"Give him time to breathe and rest. He has been on his feet all day, and he is hungry," he said.

Antoni looked at him gloomily.

"I can go," he muttered. "I shall not be hungry long, and my tired feet will rest in prison."

"Well, don't despair yet. They will soon free you, and you will come back vindicated."

"I don't need to be vindicated, but I shall not come back just the same," answered the young man apathetically.

The old woman's groaning finally impressed itself on his mind. He turned to her and kissed her hand.

"Don't cry, mother. Be in good health. We can't help it—such is my destiny. With God's help you will find another in my place. Thank you for your goodness to me."

Marcinowa did not seem to understand.

"Let us be going," said Andryanek.

Antoni went out into the street. There was a blackness before his eyes, and his knees trembled. Taking advantage of the dusk, he glanced toward the doctor's house. His heart was flooded with bitterness, and he walked quickly. They passed the village, and the empty road stretched before them, with the blossoming steppe on either side. But Antoni would no longer go there to hunt beast and bird. A great grief seized him. He possessed only one thing—the property of even a poor man—his liberty, and he loved it. Now he had nothing—nothing to lighten his sad lot.

With his head bent between his shoulders he walked on without even feeling tired. He took no account of either his movements or his exterior impressions. He only felt that he was approaching some end, that everything in him became stiff—that he was afraid of nothing, and desired nothing.

A full moon shone in the heavens, and a great quietude fell over nature. Somewhere in

the far distance a bell rang. Andryanek walked ahead, the other guards followed the prisoner. From time to time Andryanek stopped. The bell sounded nearer, and finally the rumbling of a wagon sounded distinctly. The horses walked slowly, and when they were opposite the prisoner he raised his eyes and stopped.

It was Marya.

Evidently she had heard of his misfortune in Kurhan.

She ordered the coachman to stop, alighted from the wagon, and approached the men.

Andryanek greeted her.

"What a misfortune!" said he. "Could I have foreseen that I should be obliged to take him to prison, I should have preferred feigning illness."

"It is dreadful," she whispered. "What a horrible calamity. Can you not prove an alibi? Where were you after you left him?"

"At Shyshko's house."

"Very well. I will talk with Shyshko about it."

"Don't do that. People will say—God knows what. Pray leave me to my fate. I was destined to perish."

"It is not true. You will pass through the misfortune. Maybe this is the last one before

happiness. They take you to Tobolsk by stages. What a torture! This Shumski was a *Fatum*. Why did he stop you then?"

Antoni said in a low voice,

"He accused me of taking you from him, and said that I was anxious to lay hands on your riches—that I had robbed him. He acted like a madman. I neither attacked him nor defended myself, but simply looked on him as a lunatic, and went away. I was thinking, 'You have made me a thief, now you are making me a rascal. May we not meet again.' But now he has made me a murderer!"

The girl put her hand on his shoulder.

"It is dreadful, but it will pass. We will take care of you. Make your mind easy and be patient. But I see they have taken you away without any preparation. Here is some money. To-morrow I will send you some clothing. Take it."

"No, thank you," said he, drawing back quickly.

She looked at him.

"Won't you take it?" she said softly.

His heart throbbed, and he obeyed her.

"Don't forget Marcinowa," he begged.

"No. Don't worry about her. She shall not lack for anything."

"If there is a letter from Walka, and I do not come back from prison, please write her that I am dead. It will be true!"

"You will come back," she said, with conviction.

He shook his head.

"You can't help him now. We must be going," sighed Andryanek.

They shook hands and parted. In Petrofska other guards took charge of Antoni, and thus he walked from village to village, several hundreds of versts, to Tobolsk.

Near Lebiaza and Kurhan, where he was known, he met with commiseration, and was well treated. He rested in the houses of his friends, who looked after him. Later on, he was only a murderer—an object of brutal curiosity and aversion. At the station they locked him up, and fed him on bread and water. On the road the guard pushed him along and cursed him. The unfortunate man, being tired and badly fed, could not walk as swiftly as the guards, and stumbled along, scorched by the sun, and parched with thirst. He met with blows, and was continually reproached with his crime. In that way he was dragged along for ten days.

Finally they arrived at Tobolsk, and he rested

in prison. He was thrown into a dirty cell to await his turn, and only then he had time to think.

He thought of his childhood spent with a man who had robbed him; he thought of his education, acquired at the cost of hunger; of his youth wasted in the struggle for bread; of his sister, alone and in poverty; of the fiancée who had died of misery; of his stolen patrimony, and then of the two years in Siberia, beginning with the theft of all his money, and almost the loss of life on the cold steppe, and ending with this filthy prison. Ill-fortune had tried all her experiments on him, as scientists' experiments are tried with a frog or a rabbit. All courage had left him long ago, and he was resigned to his fate, whatever it might be.

When a whole month passed, and he was not called for, he ceased even to expect his sentence—he doubted even about the *katorga* (hard labour in Siberia). He would surely remain here until his death. The keepers, who, in the beginning had been very severe and uneasy regarding his behaviour, became more lenient after knowing him better. They even took a fancy to him, and doubted if it were possible that he could be a murderer. One day they even permitted him to take a walk in the prison yard. He

begged, as a favour, to be allowed to work on the roads, which work was all done by convicts, but this was refused. He might be proved innocent, and again he might rot in his cell.

One day he was called before the judge. Having heard the accusation, he said nothing, but only wept. Everything was against him. In the end such a chaos arose in his mind, that he did not understand whether now or then he had been unconscious.

"Perhaps you have some witnesses. Who saw you that evening?" asked the judge.

"Shyshko saw me immediately after my talk with Shumski. Only the dead man could defend me. It is true we quarrelled. He was jealous of my skill as an engineer, and he regretted losing the girl. But I did not touch him, as I desire to see my country before I die! No!"

"Then we will bring Shyshko here. In the meanwhile maybe you will be able to recall other circumstances."

The judge looked at him with sympathy. This man aroused his pity. His thick hair was thickly strewn with silver, and his sad look compelled commiseration.

Another month passed, when one day he was called to the room where the prisoners could see friends. When he entered someone fell on

his neck, and someone else grasped his hands. Dazzled by the light he stood motionless. After a while he recognised the brown head of Tomoy, Marcinowa's wrinkled face, and the dark eyes of Panna Marya. The dog squealed, the old woman cried, and the girl looked at him sadly.

"Shyshko is here," she said, breathing heavily.

"For Heaven's sake, Antoni. You are looking so bad," said Marcinowa, still weeping.

Then she began to unpack different bundles, and take out and put into his hands various dainties.

"Do you know," said the girl, "for two months we have been searching for Shyshko—Marcinowa found him. She went over the whole steppe searching for him. She went as far as the gold mines on foot, and she brought him to Lebiaza."

"Oh, mother!" whispered Antoni, bending to her knees.

"Yes, I went," said the old woman. "Your girl said to me, 'Without Shyshko he is lost!' I seized my stick and went to Kurhan. He was not there, and they told me he had gone to the gold mines. I followed him. It is not difficult to travel during the summer. This and that one helped me along—took me on his wagon and showed me the way. Nothing bad

happened to me, only my feet ached. I found him and begged him to come."

"No matter about that," interrupted Panna Marya.

"On the contrary, it does matter, because I brought him here. I thought, 'He wants a thousand roubles, and I am sure there is somebody to whom Antoni is worth more. If not, I will give Shyshko my house, and the rest Antoni will earn if I can only get him back. My boy my tutor, my benefactor. How glad I am to see you again. Now I will come every day until you are free.'"

"Is it possible that good luck will at last come to me? I cannot believe it," he murmured.

"My father is at the judge's office with Shyshko, In Kurhan people are whispering that Shaman is the murderer."

"Shaman? Why?"

"Well, they say that no money was found on the corpse, and he was seen to have money with him."

"Some huntsmen saw Shaman on the steppe that day."

"My God, if only Shyshko would tell the truth. I was in his house for three or four hours, and then I went towards the Tobol to take rest."

"Don't be frightened about that. That scoundrel will tell the truth because the doctor will not give him the money otherwise," said Marcinowa.

"I forgot to tell you," said Panna Marya, "that Shyshkin is waiting impatiently for you. He wishes to give you Shumski's position. If we could only end up this miserable matter here. This is the last misfortune."

The jailer appeared with a paper in his hand and called two soldiers.

"Take him before the judge," he commanded.

Antoni went cheerfully. The women followed him, and the dog slunk into the office with them. Shyshko was there with the doctor.

"The case grows more and more entangled, but your friends have the best opinion of you," said the judge. "The Community of Lebiaza takes you on its own responsibility until the time of the trial. On his part Doctor Gostynski goes on a two thousand rouble bond for you, so you will be free. You may go to Lebiaza, but with the understanding that you will come here when I call you. I hope that you, on your part, will make all possible effort to prove that you are innocent."

With trembling hand Antoni signed the agreement to come at any moment he was called,

and then began to kiss the doctor's hands. He even shook hands with Shyshko. He laughed and cried by turns.

They left without an escort, and went to an hotel. It seemed to Antoni that he had just risen from a severe illness—that he was resuscitated from the grave.

Marcinowa was intoxicated with joy, and there was plenty of talk in the room. Shyshko, looking at them, smiled, and something better stirred within him.

"I am a rascal, a gambler, and murderer," said he, when he had become tipsy. "I have stolen gold, marked cards, and knocked people on the head often—and how much counterfeit money have I passed to the Kirghizes! And I am free, while this poor honest boy has sunk so deep. The man who made Shumski cold was very clever. I am anxious to know who it was. I will help you find him—I promise you that."

"It was Shaman," affirmed Panna Marya.

"This will be a good lesson for you," said the doctor, slapping Antoni on the shoulder. "From this time you must abandon your night wanderings. Well, let us be going. Andukajtys, get the horses ready."

They started home. Antoni drove the women,

and the Zmudzin returned with the doctor and Shyshko. It was already cold, and everything around was dead. Marcinowa, wrapped in a sheepskin coat, spoke little.

"Are you not cold, Antoni?" she asked from time to time.

"No, mother," he answered, "freedom warms me."

Maybe something else warmed him too. He talked with the girl.

Marcinowa wished to listen to their conversation, but soon the cold compelled her to draw her ears beneath the furs, so she shook her head, and said,

"I wonder you can talk through hundreds of versts. I should not wonder if you were quarrelling, but you are talking so softly."

Panna Marya laughed heartily. They passed Kurhan, and felt as though they were already home. Antoni looked around and reined in the horses.

"I lay here," he whispered, "and I did not know that salvation from death was so near me."

"And then you reproached me bitterly for saving your life—such is human gratitude."

He bent over, wrapping up her feet solicitously.

"It was on account of Shumski," he answered. "Do you remember that at Petrofka I wished to give you my last twenty kopeks for the rescue?"

"And you—do you remember how you refused to take the tulub?"

"And your good-bye when I left you the first time?"

"And your answer when father asked you about that girl?"

"Tomoy alone loved me and trusted me."

"I was betrayed even by him."

"But you like him nevertheless."

"One must like something."

"Did you like Shumski?"

"Much less than you liked Panna Shyshko."

He shook his head, and asked suddenly,

"Do you remember the last time I bought some shot in your store? At that moment it seemed to me that I was back in my own country. I seemed to smell the lilac and hear the song of the nightingale."

"You were longing for the spring. Now if you will take the position Shyshkin offers you, you will soon be able to return. One prosperous year and you are free."

"I am not free. I must work and pay back my debt to your father. Perhaps you will like

me sometime. Every man must have something in this world—perhaps I shall earn that also.”

The girl smiled silently. The golden cupola of the cerkoff (church) of Lebiaza could already be seen. Marcinowa opened one eye, and saw that Antoni had already turned his entire back to the horses.

“Good gracious!” she said, “I am glad we did not have an accident with such a careless driver. I see now that the people say true—there is a special providence which watches over drunkards, lovers, and children.”

“You are right, mother,” affirmed Antoni quietly.

There was a great festival at the doctor’s house that day.

The whole village came to see the poor fellow. The dining-room was full of smoke, steam, and noise. They drank an ocean of tea and consumed a mountain of zakuska. Nobody doubted Antoni’s innocence. In the evening Shyshkin arrived. The millionaire spoke familiarly with the peasants, drank tea from his saucer, biting the sugar, and after the tenth glass he shone with perspiration. There was no difference between him and the others, except that he was fatter, and a bigger pocket-book peeped out from his greasy tulub. He spoke often business, and

from time to time looked at Antoni from beneath his heavy eyebrows. Finally he rose and called the doctor into another room.

"I come to rob you of your technologist," he said.

Gostynski made a grimace.

"I need him also. Then his case is not finished. I deposited a few thousand roubles for him. He must go to Tobolsk at any time he is called. I don't know if he will be able to satisfy you."

"Casimir Michajlowich, you are a smart man! You want to keep him for yourselves. I will give you back your bond, and I will charge you one rouble less on every ox you put in my distilleries—only give me that young fellow."

"How much will you pay him?"

"I will give him one hundred roubles a month, his board-room, and living."

"Wasili Theodorowitch, it is not enough. I will not let you have him for less than one hundred and fifty roubles. Wait, I will call him here."

He went into the other room, and saw Antoni and Panna Marya talking quietly.

"Listen," said he. "Shyshkin wants you. Don't come down from my price, because you will have plenty to do, and, besides you, there is no man fit to take the position."

"Perhaps I shall not be able to fill it."

"You must. It's your future. You paid enough for the instruction—it's time you had some benefit from it."

"If only Smolin and Berezin let him alone," said Panna Marya. "He is not Shumski, who got along by flattering them."

"Well, he must keep in with the old man."

He entered the office with Antoni. After an hour's talk the young man had accepted a brilliant position, and left the room completely intoxicated by the unusual prosperity which had come into his life. Laughing delightedly, he showed Panna Marya the agreement and a month's salary which he had been paid in advance.

"Every month I shall pay your father a part of what I owe him—if only this Shumski will not torment me any more."

"Blood will not lose its voice, even after many years, and it will call up the murderer."

"During the three months in prison, it seemed to me, that nearly every evening he stood in the corner, and mockingly repeated, *Anima vilis ! Anima vilis !*"

He passed his hand over his forehead.

"But now I think I shall beat him, because there is nothing worse that bad fortune can bring me."

They talked together, standing near the window, far away from the other people in the room. By this time Shyshkin had stopped drinking tea, and was drinking whiskey and rum. He was puffing like a porpoise. Finally he rose and prepared to go. His small bloodshot eyes roamed around the room until they spied Antoni. He stumbled over to him, and leaning against him, said,

"Let us be going, my soul."

"Better stay over night. It is very cold," said the girl.

"Cold is healthy!" laughed the old man. "Well, Marya Cazimierovna, you must part with your boy. I will take him with me. If I had a third daughter I would never give him back to you. But you are stronger than I am. Now say good-bye to him, and give him some good advice. Here he lowered his voice. "He must treat Smolin like this," and he doubled his fist, "and Berezin like this," making a caressing movement with his hand. "Otherwise it will be with him as it was with the other man. Nobody would tell him that but me, because I wish to keep him for a long time."

The young people looked at each other in astonishment. Was it a drunken man's vagary, or was there a grain of truth in it?

Shyshkin said nothing more.

CHAPTER X.

THE winter and summer passed. They brought millions of sheep to Kurhan, and the dreadful slaughter reddened the ground with blood—the whole Tobol ran blood. Batteries of kettles melted the tallow, and the squares were paved with barrels. Heaps of skins were swayed by the wind. Beyond the city, packs of dogs, half wild, devoured the entrails, and the people could hardly move after the hard work. The steppe was covered with Jack Frost, and the Kirghizes directed their herds toward the south, loading their jurtas on their horses, going to seek winter quarters. One day a young woman alighted from the post coach and entered the square. Everyone was so busy that no attention was paid to her. She looked around on the half-wild crowd, and was half choked by the smell of grease and blood. Her ears were filled with the dreadful noise made by the animals and people. Finally, she stopped a man, who was holding a piece of bread in hands stained with blood, devouring it

ravenously, as he walked slowly among the people.

"Can you show me the way to the house of Mrozowiecki?" she asked.

"There, at the corner. I am going there, and you can come with me."

"And my trunks?"

"Leave them here. I will send a telega after them. But you will not find Antoni home. He came yesterday with sheep from the steppe, and he will not be home before all of them are killed. I am going to fetch dinner for him and the old woman."

"How far away are the sheep?"

"A couple of versts on the Tobol."

"Will you take me there?"

"Very well. Perhaps you are his sister?"

"Yes."

"He will be very glad. When you did not come in the spring he doubted if you would ever come."

"Perhaps he is already married?"

"They were waiting for you. The whole summer he was in the steppe with Berezin's cotton. He brought with him twenty thousand sheep. There will be plenty of work for a month."

While talking they arrived at a very decent

house. Andukajtys opened the kitchen door, and said,

"Mother, Antoni's sister has arrived. Give her something to eat."

Marcinowa welcomed the new-comer with great joy. She seized her face in her hard hands, and kissed her on both cheeks. Then she looked at the girl attentively.

"You are not looking well, my dear girl," said she. "I can be proud of my Antoni. He must be tired now after his long trip over the steppe, but before he went he looked like an apple. You glutton, get away from my stove. What do you want?"

"I am hungry," muttered Andukajtys.

"In the first place I must take care of the girl, and then I will send dinner to my Antoni. You must wait, and you, young lady, sit down and have something to eat."

"I am anxious to see Antoni."

"Immediately. Andukajtys, have the carriage ready. We are not poor—we don't walk. In the meantime I will have the luggage brought here, and get your room ready. Glory to God you have come. The boy wants a wife."

Walka smiled sadly.

In a short while Andukajtys had the kibitka ready, and they set off. Beyond the city all

the fields were covered with sheep, and the horses walked in pools of blood. The people, covered with blood and grease, looked like souls escaped from the realms of the damned. Andukajtys, screaming at the top of his lungs, made way for them, but sometimes they were obliged to stop and wait, breathing the smoke and steam from the intestines. Finally the Zmudzin stopped the horses.

"We must walk," he said. "Here is Antoni coming."

Walka was watching the slaughter of the sheep. Some men killed them, others skinned them, and took away the offal—others threw the meat in heaps like wood. The blood flowed to the Tobol, and in the stream of gore walked several men, bending beneath the weight of fresh skins. These they placed in a heap in one place, where a fat old fellow counted them, and marked in a book the awkward figures. All the people wore used-up boots, pink shirts, dirty halets, and faded caps.

Having just returned from the steppe, they did not care about their appearance. The dust, wind, and perspiration had marked their faces; their hair was long, and their eyes feverish from lack of sleep.

Walka looked frightened. She could not

recognise her brother, and she was ashamed to acknowledge it. She stopped, afraid to walk in the blood splashing about her feet.

Andukajtys rescued her from her embarrassment.

"Antoni Stanislovovich!" he shouted, "here you have your dinner and your sister."

One of the dreadful-looking workmen threw his burden from his shoulders and rushed toward them. Only then she remembered something of his features, and, with an impulse of happiness, she threw herself into his arms. Both wept and called each other by name.

A fat peasant approached them.

"Good-day. Be welcome, my young girl," he said familiarly. "You hardly recognise your brother. He is all right."

"Who is he?" asked Walka, in a whisper.

"My employer, Shyshkin."

The girl opened her eyes wider and wider with astonishment. How different things were here to what she had known at home. The people, the country, the customs, the sky—even the animals—had different, wild, strong characteristics.

After the greetings were over, and Antoni sat down to eat his dinner, she got a better look at him. He did not appear as a stranger. The

strength, the sense of his own worth, the repose, the hardening and settling of the outlines had erased most of his old characteristics. He was older and heavier. His voice was hard, his looks were sharp, and even his features were sharpened and more pronounced. While eating and talking with her, he still kept an eye on business. He watched the number of skins—he gave orders, and answered the queries of some business men. Having refreshed himself he embraced her once more.

"Now I must return to my work. You go home and rest, and perhaps toward evening I will drop in to see you."

"Haven't you somebody else to carry these skins?" she asked. "Is that proper work for a graduate of an Institute of Technology?"

"Well, here it is quite different, my dear. Everyone has two hands for every kind of work. And then, I have some interest here. Over twenty thousand sheep is my profit. I must look over the account."

He left her and went back to work.

She returned home, and was obliged to be satisfied with the company of Marcinowa.

In the house partly occupied by Antoni, there was also Shyshkin's office, warehouse, and a dram-shop, which was as full of people as a

hive is of bees. Walka was lost in this labyrinth. She wondered at the vast amount of movement and noise.

After a whole day's rest, she found her way to the city, and the place where they were still slaughtering the sheep. She went there every day for a short chat with her brother, wondering at his persistent work. The rest of the time she spent in the kitchen, trying to be of some help to Marcinowa.

One morning Walka was left alone. Marcinowa went to the market, having bidden the girl to bake some bread. Walka had the best of intentions, but no experience. However, she began to mix the dough. While she was doing this, a young girl entered the kitchen, asked for Marcinowa, and remained there. She took off her furs, rubbed her cold hands, and behaved as though she was in her own house. A man came in, and they transacted some business.

Walka had become accustomed to Siberian familiarity, and did not pay any attention. The young woman, however, began the conversation.

"You don't know how to mix the bread," she said, and, without further hesitation, she rolled up her sleeves, sinking her white hands in the dough.

Walka looked at them, and could not refrain

from uttering an exclamation—she beheld on the girl's finger her brother's ring.

"Then you are Antoni's fiancée!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. And you?"

"I am Walka."

"Walka! He did not tell me of your arrival! When did you come?"

"A week ago."

"A whole week, and he did not tell me anything."

"I have hardly seen him myself."

"Well, such is life here. A beginner, wishing to make money, must, of necessity, become almost a wild man. We will bake this bread, and then we will go to Lebiaza."

"Thank you, but——" whispered Walka.

Panna Marya smiled.

"You will see him there oftener than here," she said, blushing slightly.

Quickly, and with experience, she divided the dough into loaves and put them into the hot stove.

Marcinowa arrived.

"Our young lady!" she exclaimed. "Good gracious! I will send for Antoni immediately."

"He will not come, because he will not think that I wish to disturb him in his work. On the

way home I will go and see him myself. And then I have not the time either. The store is empty, and the dram-shops are without whiskey. I must be going. I will take Panna Walerya with me."

The old woman protested, but without avail. The girls attended to the errands together, and then started off, Panna Marya driving. Beyond the city the slaughter was still going on.

Antoni recognised his betrothed from afar, and immediately came to her.

"Oh, God, how horrid he is!" thought Walka. "How does he dare show himself looking like that?"

But the girl smiled at him cordially, and her sun-burned face lighted up with happiness.

"How is our father?" he asked.

"He is well. And what success have you?"

"I shall clear three hundred roubles."

"How long do you think you will have to work?"

"A couple of weeks."

"Any news about the case?"

"Shyshko has disappeared."

"We are waiting for you."

"Thank you for taking Walka with you. As soon as I am through with this work, I will come and spend the whole week with you."

"You had better go back to your sheep now. Good-bye!"

He kissed her hand, and looked after her as she drove off.

The girls became better acquainted during the drive. Walka questioned Marya about everything, but mostly about her brother. She then learned the dreadful history of his life in Siberia, and wept. Then, kissing her companion, she thanked her for the help she had rendered him.

"Without you he would have been lost hundreds of times. How can we ever repay you for all that?"

"He did more for me than I for him," answered the girl seriously. "I was bad, vindictive, hard—nobody loved me, and I cared for nobody. He made me better. He taught me how to be happy. He knew my bad soul—I knew his bad lot. We suffered and fought together. Now we are not afraid, because we shall go through life together."

"I thought I should find you already married."

"We are waiting for the end of that horrid case."

"Then you will remain here for ever?"

"He must still work here for a long time. Remain? Who remains here if he is not bound?"

Like the birds, we will await the time of departure. My God, I have already waited so many years!"

A few tears flowed from her eyes.

From that moment Walka loved her dearly. Soon she loved the whole family, and felt as though she was among her own people.

Antoni did not put in an appearance for two weeks, and then he had only a few days' leave of absence.

Siberia was already in the grasp of winter. The snow fell, and storms whistled about the house. The evenings passed very pleasantly, spent near the fire in the doctor's room—they never could finish chatting about their country. When Walka spoke of it all eyes were directed toward her, their cheeks flushed and their breath came quickly. She was very seldom interrupted, and when she stopped talking, one could feel the quiet, and hear the beating hearts and deep sighs.

The doctor's pipe went out; Panna Marya's busy hands lay on her knees; Antoni forgot to put wood on the fire; Utowich's spinning wheel became silent; and the sober hard-working people became as children listening to fairy tales—like youth, which is ever forgetful of realities.

Walka had a special talent for talking of her country, and the doctor was the first to fight against the poison which sapped their strength and will. He interrupted her, and urged that they should retire. The third day he forbade the theme altogether.

"Children," said he, "outside is the steppe, and you must remember we are obliged to stay here a long time. You know how we suffer from home-sickness in this country—do you wish to suffer again from what you have already overcome?"

Antoni and Marya shivered, as though the cold wind of the steppe blew on them, and the boy, drooping his head, said to his sister,

"Speak of the people. Is Burski still living?"

"No. He died. Wistycki's family now lives in Warsaw."

"And our Promieniew?"

"In the hands of strangers."

"He did not long enjoy that of which he robbed me."

Andukajtys entered the room covered with snow.

"I have seen the priest," said he, out of breath.

"Where? What priest?" asked all at once.

"Our priest. A new one just arrived. I have

seen him in Kurhan. He will stay only two days. He is going further. I galloped here to tell you the news. I haven't even eaten anything."

Antoni looked at Panna Marya and she blushed deeply. The doctor laughed.

"We must hasten with the sacraments," he said.

"I am going immediately," said Utowich, "perhaps he knew my brother! Marya, where is your white dress? Panna Walerya, you must fix her veil for her. I am afraid we shall be left."

She rushed to open the closet to urge Andukajtys. Walka rushed to help her. The doctor looked at the young couple.

"Well, take her, Antoni," he said quietly. "I postponed it until we could get a priest. God sends him to you and I must give up. But you must live with me, because I could not live alone."

"As you say, father," whispered Antoni, trembling with emotion.

He pressed the girl's hands to his lips.

"I am still poor, and maybe I have not yet deserved this happiness, but you must not refuse."

"I will make you happy and myself also."

"Let us be ready then," said the doctor, going out.

The young people were for a while dumb with happiness—timid . . . After a time Antoni could contain himself no longer.

"My dearest!" he cried. "Now indeed I am richer than kings. I thought it would come only after many years, and now that it has come, my heart feels as though it would burst from my bosom."

They went toward the window standing there awhile, close to each other, forgetting the whole world. Then Marya said:

"I must go."

"Where, dear?" he asked, astonished.

"To tell the people. We are not only waiting for the priest. Someone must tell them."

"I will send Andukajtys."

"No. Good news must be told by happy people."

"Then I shall go, because I am the happiest."

"Very well. But don't forget anyone."

Through the quiet sleeping village a quick step resounded. To some of the houses a man came, knocked at the blinds, and awakened the poor, sorrowful people. Sleepy slow voices asked apathetically: "What is it?" with the intonation of those who expect nothing.

And a strong, gay voice answered,

"Hasten, brothers! A priest is in Kurhan and he will remain only two days."

Immediately a light shone in the house and sleep flew from every eye. All hearts beat with joy.

"Oh Jesus! A priest!" was heard, in the voices of men, women, and children.

And the steps went further down the street, carrying the good news. Lights shone in most of the houses, and it grew more lively—the dogs barked, doors squeaked, and people passed out into the street.

"Have you heard the news? A priest is at Kurhan."

"Joseph, get the sleigh ready."

"Marysia, wrap the child up well."

"Old man, don't smoke your pipe before confession."

"Kazik, dress for your wedding."

"What shall we give the priest?"

"You must not forget the holy water."

The noise increased. Thus, on a cloudy morning, when a cock crows, it is repeated further and further, until people rise tired and sleepy.

The first sleigh started from the doctor's house. It was followed by a second and a

third. The awakened peasants appeared on their thresholds, asking what was the matter. On being told the news they returned tranquilly to bed.

At the post-station in Kurhan, where the priest stopped, there were plenty of horses and sleighs—in the room people were suffocating. Little children were brought to be baptized, and everyone wished to make confession. Ten couples were waiting to be married, and everyone pressed around the priest, who, exhausted by hard work and his journey, staggered, became red and pale by turns, but still kept up by sheer strength of will. And he was obliged to hasten, although the people were very patient. The couples waiting for the marriage ceremony were patient, and even the children did not scream when being baptized!

The second day Antoni and Panna Marya were married.

He took his wife and sister in the sleigh to his house. He went to see Shyshkin, and the women packed everything in a great hurry. They dined hastily, the doctor urging them to hurry, being probably afraid that his daughter would remain. Antoni obtained leave of absence from Shyshkin, and toward evening they drove off in the direction of Lebiaza.

Marcinowa and Walka remained in Kurhan, not wishing to bother the young people at the beginning of their new life.

In Petrofka the peasants detained the doctor, begging him on their knees to help them in many cases of typhoid fever. He remained there for a couple of days, ordering Andukajtys to bring his medicine box.

In that way the newly married couple were alone, Utowich being busy in the store.

Toward evening she came upstairs, and said, "There is someone in the store who wishes to see you."

"I am sure there has been some accident in the distillery," he said, and went out.

"Who is it?" he asked, when outside the room.

"Panna Shyshko. She said she must see you."

"The deuce! I have no business with her."

"But she has some with you, for she looks troubled."

He hesitated for a while, and returned to the room.

"The girl is in the kitchen. Let us go and see what she wants."

They went downstairs. The girl from the futor was in the hall, leaning against the wall. She looked wild and gloomy.

She glared at the doctor's daughter like a wild beast and muttered a greeting.

"What do you wish with me?" asked Antoni.

"Perhaps you can tell me where my brother Frank is."

"I haven't seen him since last spring."

"That is bad. He thought he would do good business, but he was mistaken. I don't care for the money. I will tell it for nothing. In the spring he told me to return to service with Shaman and watch the old miser. During last summer I learned something which not one of you suspected. I waited for Frank in vain. But yesterday the old witch brought three robbers to the futor. They assaulted old Shaman, and before I woke they wounded him mortally. Hearing his groans and the noise, I loosed the dogs and set them on the men, then I seized the rifle, but they ran away and the old witch with them. The old man is in agony, and what is most wonderful is, he speaks our language, and shouts continually, 'Don't let Mrozowiecki in. Shut the door. Tell him that I am not at home.' My horse dropped dead at your door. Give me another, for I must return. You can do as you like—I have done my part."

"Thank you," said Marya. "Come in until they can get your horse ready."

"I don't want to come in," growled the girl.

"Shall I go?" asked Antoni, looking at his wife.

"Certainly, but not alone. I am going with you, and we will also take Andryanek and Lukowski. How far is it to the futor?"

"About three hundred versts."

"If only we arrive in time. We must hasten."

A cold dreadful night in the limitless steppe was their first wedding night. The sleighs glided without a road, directed by the cat-like eyes and hunter's memory of Andryanek. At every twenty or thirty versts they gave the horses vodka and bread and hastened on. The mad ride lasted two nights and a day. When they arrived the horses lay down, and they left them, rushing on foot for the last two versts.

The girl entered first.

From the izba they heard animated conversation, quarrelling, and then beseeching.

"Who is there?" asked Antoni.

"He is alone. He is talking to himself like that all the while. I wonder he isn't dead yet."

The young girl opened the door. A faint light filled the izba, coming through the panes of mica. There was great disorder, for the

assault had been committed in this room. The furniture was broken, the felt was stained with blood, and the trunks had been broken open.

On a heap of sheepskins Shaman lay groaning. Although the door made no noise, he saw and recognised Antoni, for he retreated to the wall, writhing and trying to hide. Antoni drew nearer, the others waited by the door.

Shaman raised his clenched fist and shook it threateningly at Shyshko.

"You serpent!" he said. "You brought him here."

Antoni stooped over him.

"Are you afraid of me? Why?"

"Serene, mighty judge!" groaned Shaman, "I served you faithfully."

Then he writhed like a serpent and screamed:

"I don't want to die! I will tell nothing. I will live. It's Berezin who sent the murderers. He is afraid of me. But I am not afraid of him. Before I die I will tell everything—not before."

He covered himself with the furs, but after a while he groaned again:

"God! What is it all worth? I worked so hard and now I must die!"

Marya knelt beside the dying man, and said, "Shaman! Tell the truth now. Man cannot

drag you into court, but God will call you before His own tribunal. Mrozowiecki came to forgive you."

"It's not true. Mrozowiecki will not pardon me. He is revengeful, and he remembers well. He will not forgive me for the sake of his children."

"He is talking about my father," whispered Antoni. "Who is he?" he asked Shaman.

"He is waiting there until I die, and then he will seize me by my beard and drag me away. Damned, damned money!"

"He must be Drozdowski," said Antoni.

"You are calling me," whispered the dying man. "Keep quiet. Don't tell anyone. He gave me plenty of money for my name. He purchased it. And he gave me as much for my speech. Twenty years I was without name and without speech. And what was it all for? What was it for? I must die anyway!"

Andryanek and Lukowski approached.

"Is he our countryman?" asked the Pole.

"No! I am Shaman," howled the wounded man.

Andryanek spat on the floor.

"No matter whether you are Shaman or not, but it is sure that you are a rascal. The thieves took everything from your trunk, but

they dropped Shumski's chain. Ah! you black souled scoundrel, it is for you that I dragged an innocent man to prison."

Shaman's teeth chattered as though with the ague.

"They have taken everything," he growled.

"You stole my money that night and changed it for worthless paper."

"Not I. The old woman did it. That old witch who killed me. Why did I not strangle her!"

"Drozdowski, what have I ever done to you, that you should so wrong me?" said Antoni. "Because of you, my father lost his good name, and we have lost our patrimony. Because of you I have been under suspicion as a murderer and a thief."

"He must now tell us everything," exclaimed Lukowski. "Speak—you!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Shaman. "I will tell you nothing. Why! I shall not go back where I came from. It is too far. But neither Burski nor Berezin shall say that Shaman did not keep his agreement. Shaman is like the tomb—like a stone. Who bought him—he had him."

"Let us burn the devil!" insisted Andryanek.

Marya overcame her disgust and again bent over Shaman.

"Drozdowski, don't you regret anything? Two orphans were driven from their home because of you. They thought you would defend them and you sold them. Now you are dying—and where will you go?"

Shaman was silent, his lips opened as though for a shout.

"Ha!" he whispered. "Those trees—the linden trees, poplars, elm trees are going against me. Judge Mrozowiecki's hounds howl! The master is dead. Is dead! I am dying also. We shall not meet."

Shaman was silent. His hands dropped and grasped the fur. His head fell forward and his eyes turned.

"He is dead," muttered Andryanek, spitting.

"He said enough. The old woman stole the money. Here is Shumski's chain. We shall find out the rest."

The girl Shyshko, standing far off, said,

"You will find nothing. The robbers carried away everything. In the cellar there were heaps of bank-notes. There are no more there. They left only the furs."

"No matter, we will look over the wolf's den," said Andryanek. "What remains Antoni will take for his wrong."

"I will not take anything. It will remain for

the girl in return for the care she took of him."

They started to look through the futon. The little fortress was apparently like a fox hole, but there were hundreds of little rooms and closets full of different kinds of merchandise. When they returned to the room where the corpse lay, they looked all through the trunks. They found some gold, cards, and herbs, old letters, prescriptions, and finally, Shumski's wallet.

"You can be silent. Here is the witness!" said Andryanek, raising it and looking at the corpse.

"We have finished," said Andryanek. "Now we must bury him and return home."

"I will not touch him," said the peasant positively.

"Lukowski, we must do it."

"Not I. I am going after the horses."

The girl laughed disdainfully. She took a shovel from a corner and left the house. In a short time she came back.

"The snow sticks. There will be a storm. The hole is ready," she said laconically.

Antoni and his wife wrapped the corpse in a piece of felt and carried it from the izba. The girl preceded them with a shovel on her shoulder—she was gloomy.

She stopped under a birch tree and looked at the two. Her lips moved and her eyelids quivered. She quickly bent and began to dig the snow.

Mrozowiecki deposited the dead man on the snow and waited until she had finished.

"You spare no pains," said Marya.

"No," she answered, raising her head. "I will make him a comfortable grave, and in the spring I will gather his bones and bury them, and put a cross over them. It will be my gratitude for his killing Shumski."

Her eyes shone with hatred and gratified vengeance. She presented a dreadful appearance for a while. An unpleasant moment followed. In the west, the white clouds opened, and the blood-red light of sunset flooded the steppe. Meanwhile, a whistling wind began to blow close to the ground.

The girl threw aside the shovel and nodded to Antoni. They took the corpse and laid it in the grave. Then Marya bent her head and recited the *Angelus Domini*. The girl filled the grave up with snow, and then planted the shovel and looked at the crimson sunset. Antoni and his wife were praying.

When they had finished, the girl asked,
"Are you going at once?"

"Yes," Antoni answered hastily.

She laughed in a strange way, and went into the house. Lukowski and Andryanek were busy with the horses. They put them in the stable and rubbed them, covering them with felts. Finally, they all thought of something to eat.

The girl opened the pantry and pointed to the samovar, but she herself would touch nothing. She lay down on a bench and, covering her head with a sheepskin, seemed to sleep.

"We must hasten," said Andryanek. "Buran (the blizzard) is coming, but it will not catch us. We shall reach Utyacka."

"It would be better to pass the night here," said Lukowski.

"Here? After such a death. I wouldn't do it for a heap of gold," shouted the peasant.

Antoni looked outside and shrugged his shoulders.

"The blizzard comes slowly."

"If we must go we had better do so immediately," said Marya.

The men dressed themselves and went to get the horses ready.

Marya said to the girl,

"We are going."

"God be with you."

"Shall you stay here?"

"Yes. Nobody drives me away from here."

"True. But how will it be possible for you to live here alone?"

"Here I was always happy. Only leave me a horse and let me be."

The bells sounded and Tomoy whined joyfully, glad to return home. Mrozowiecki wrapped his wife up solicitously, and whistled for the dog, driving off in the wake of Andryanek's sleigh.

The night was clear, and the quiet of the steppe was only disturbed now and then by a gust of wind, blowing near the ground, whirling the snow, then raising the white, cold dust, it whistled shortly from time to time.

Andryanek turned, glanced at the sky with the eye of a connoisseur, then struck the horses and shouted to Antoni:

"Don't loiter behind, because if we are separated, the steppe will devour us."

Andryanek's troyka was excellent. The yellow mare, in the centre trotted remarkably well, and the two side horses, stretching their necks, galloped along. Tomoy could not follow and howled pitifully.

"Antoni, let us take the dog into the sleigh," said Marya.

They stopped, and Tomoy placed himself at their feet. When Antoni looked ahead he could

see Andryanek's sleigh no longer. He struck the horses, and rushed on in the direction from which the bells sounded. They heard the bells—once to the left and then to the right—and according to that he directed the horses. At length, surprised he could not reach him, he began to listen more attentively, and his heart throbbed.

"I can't make out whether I hear my bell or Andryanek's," Antoni said uneasily.

"Take ours off," advised his wife.

He stopped, took off the bell, and listened. There was dead silence.

He shouted with all his strength, but his voice was lost, without any echo. The air became thick, and filled with big white flakes, falling slowly. In a moment their clothing was white.

"Snow fall," whispered Marya, looking around.

They looked at each other, each seized with a dreadful thought.

"Sit down and let the horses direct us. Hurry them, but don't try to direct them. Let them go where they wish."

He obeyed, and they started off.

Darkness fell quickly. The steppe and sky became one grey-white mass, cut with zig-zags of snow, which covered up what little living vegetation remained.

"This is your first experience," said Marya. "A few years ago I was lost for twenty-four hours between Petroska and Lebiaza. Father went to search for me with several companies of peasants and they found me half dead."

"Here, only God can find us and lead us, for there are no human beings around here. Andryanek must have been lost also."

"Without a doubt. It is difficult to find the way in good weather, but now it is impossible! Don't force the horses. If they stop the snow will bury us."

Covered with perspiration the horses went along, led by the yellow mare, who seemed to know the danger. With her instinct, born of a long life in the steppe, she sniffed the air and earth and became uneasy. The snow was already knee-high. Antoni rang the bell and shouted again, but the sound was lost—melted in the thick air. They advanced slowly, without being able to see the horses in front of them. It was dreadful!

"And the probability is that it will last three days and three nights," muttered Mrozowiecki.

"Yes."

"And when the horses stop?"

"Then death."

They looked at each other.

"Are you afraid?" she asked, with white lips.

"My Lord! To die now!" he whispered, shuddering.

"Don't let the horses stop. They must move on—they must!" she cried.

The sleigh touched something hard—it was birch stumps.

"Woods!" said Antoni. "Perhaps it will be better to remain among the trees."

"No, no! Go! Move on! If we stop we are lost."

He whipped the horses, and they walked on through the snow, snorting, afraid, tired. The sleigh disappeared in the snow. At that moment they heard a whirring noise, as though great birds were making ready to fly, and the wind struck the horses in the breast with such impetus that they turned, bent their heads, and staggered as though drunk.

"Buran" (the blizzard), whispered Marya.

The wind drowned their voices. The snow did not fall—the flakes could not be seen, and only a white dust flew unceasingly, whistling, howling, laughing, weeping. This was the music of the steppe.

With the last remnants of strength and wild with fright, the horses struggled to advance,

urged on by Antoni's whip, and sinking deeper and deeper in the snow. The wind actually pushed them along at times. Finally, Antoni looked at his wife. Her eyes were closed.

"Marya, are you cold?" he asked.

She awakened and stretched herself.

"No. Only I am very sleepy."

"For God's sake, don't go to sleep. You will freeze to death if you sleep!"

"I know it, but I can't resist."

"Have pity! It is death!"

He paid no more attention to the horses, but began to rub her hands and eyes with snow, and finally, to shake her. She came to her senses for a while, but again closed her eyelids. She could not resist further. He forced some whiskey down her throat and drank some himself. He felt as though he were turning into a lump of ice.

The horses stopped. The snow reached their chests, and in their fright they began to jump, kick, and scream, trying, in their despairing efforts to free themselves, to tear the harness. Finally, the yellow mare broke her collar, and with streaming mane and tail and bloodshot eyes, she disappeared in the snow. The other horses, not so strong, neighed pitifully, reared, and finally fell, their shuddering growing fainter

and fainter. Then Antoni saw death before them. She stood before him, and the snow covering them was her veil, the wind her song. Her domain was this grey-white thicket which surrounded them on all sides.

He jumped from the sleigh, carrying his wife in his arms. He did not know what he was doing. The dog seized him by the sleeve and howled. He howled also, like a wild beast. He began to remove the snow from the sleigh, and placed the sleeping woman at the bottom, covering her with everything he could find. Then he laid down beside her, warming her with his respiration. Tomoy slipped in and lay beside his mistress.

The snow began to cover this mound, formed by two people and a dog; mortal sleep descended on them. At first the horses' heads could be seen, and there was a feeble movement beneath the furs in the sleigh, the only proof that life still remained. Then, on the level steppe, horses, sleigh, and people formed a hillock which looked like a grave, and was still as the grave. Buran (the blizzard) grew stronger, and the night seemed endless.

Andryanek and Lukowski lost the sound of the bell. Then the intelligent peasant turned his horses back, and by closely watching their

tracks they returned to the futor without much trouble. He expected to find Mrozowiecki already there, and was much grieved at not finding his friend.

"They have lost their way. May God save them!" he said, knowing that it would be impossible to search for them until the storm was over.

They were very tired, and lay down, falling asleep at once.

The girl said nothing to them, pretending to be asleep. But when she was sure that they would not hear her, she rose, and leaning against the window, listened to the storm. She was not frightened—on the contrary, it gave her a wild sort of pleasure. In her mind she could see the two suffering people. For one of them she would willingly have given her life—the other she could have killed with her own hands. They were united—let them perish together! When they left she hoped it would be their last night. They would freeze before they reached home. Her hatred was stronger than her love, as she listened to the howling of buran (the blizzard). . . .

Then she heard different sounds—groaning, snorting, and muffled knocking. Something dark appeared before the window and fell at the

threshold. The girl seized a hatchet, and went fearlessly to the hall.

"Who is there?" she asked, and receiving no answer, she boldly opened the door. Something big lay in the snow. She touched it with her foot and then with her hand. It was a horse. Uneasy and curious, she carefully examined the animal, and recognised Antoni's yellow mare.

In the presence of this proof of peril she grew frightened and her heart ached. She took care to ascertain that the animal was living, and covered it with a piece of felt. Then she stood for a moment, torn by conflicting thoughts.

Twice she approached Andryanek, only to draw back. The wind struck the walls of the house and laughed. She remembered then, that summer evening when the young scythe merchant stopped there. He spoke to her of her own country, and he taught her a song—he was good, very good.

She leaned against the wall and wept, and with the tears her hatred flowed away. Without further hesitation she shook Andryanek.

"Get up! Antoni's mare lies at the threshold."

"The mare alone? Where are they?" muttered the sleepy peasant.

"They must be covered with snow!"

"What then?"

"Go and search."

"Are you crazy? Is the steppe a courtyard that I could find them?"

"Stupid! If the mare is here they cannot be far off. The horses returned in their tracks until they lost strength."

"Yes, but who will find the traces. It is you who are stupid."

"My dogs will find them. Enough of this talk. The day breaks. Let us be going."

"You! Oh, my God!" muttered Andryanek. "Even if we find them they will be frozen. How unfortunate my dear friend is."

He and Lukowski had risen.

The girl took the shovels, called the dogs, and caressing them, let them smell a woollen scarf left by Antoni some time ago. She had kept it in her trunk. Then she led the dogs into the yard, and let them smell the horses, then gave the command—"Search."

The dogs went into the snow boldly, and the girl followed them with a shovel.

The wind was strong and the snow filled their eyes. In order not to get lost, the girl tied a rope around her waist, and Andryanek held the end. Lukowski followed. They advanced very slowly, for the dogs often lost the trail. They dug in the snow, and several times

returned to the same place. The two men and the girl could hardly move on account of the deep snow.

After several hours of this hard work they had only reached the birch grove, a few hundred steps from the house. The futor disappeared, and Andryanek said,

"May God enable us to find the house when night falls."

The girl struggled on, talking to the dogs. All at once both hounds rushed to a mound of snow and began to dig with great ardour. The girl was sunk in the snow up to her armpits, and sometimes her head was covered, but she obstinately followed the dogs.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Andryanek, "were I not married, I would marry her. How strong she is."

"The dogs have found something," shouted Lukowski.

"It must be Shaman, their master," answered the peasant.

He sank in the snow up to his neck, and screamed:

"Come here. I have struck something hard.

Lukowski began to dig in the snow. The wind blew the snow back again. It was hard work. The girl threw off her tulub (sheepskin overcoat) and worked stubbornly. This lasted

about an hour, and they were growing tired. Finally, the shovel struck something hard—it was a horse's head, stiff and dead, with blood-flecked foam frozen on its mouth.

"It is they," whispered Andryanek, "and they are already frozen."

Certainty gave them greater strength. They threw aside the snow with their hands and feet, the dogs worked with their noses. They reached the furs and felts, something immediately moved, and Tomoy jumped out, his whole body trembling. The dogs rushed to him, barking joyfully, but he could not play with them, and, faithful unto death, would not permit himself to be moved from the furs.

They tore away the frozen furs, and the girl seized Antoni in her arms. He was stiff, white and cold, like a piece of bone. He held a broken whip in one hand, the other arm was around his wife. The girl pulled him out, and laid him on the snow. Andryanek lifted out Marya.

"They are suffocated," he said.

"No. They will live," muttered the girl.

"The place where the dog lay is warm," said Lukowski.

"That is true. Well, we must rub them and move them. Here is the whiskey. Put some of it down their throats."

Having taken off their sheepskin overcoats, they began to revive the unfortunate couple. Antoni was the first to swallow some of the whiskey. The girl rubbed him with snow and warmed him with her own respiration.

"She is alive also!" shouted Andryanek. "Now we must carry them to the futor, to the warmth. The dogs will lead us."

He carried Marya, and the girl and Lukowski followed, carrying Antoni between them. Now the dogs did not hesitate, and the smoke of the house soon guided them.

The blizzard was still bewildering and the way was difficult. They looked like atoms moving on the mighty steppe, which, in revenge for having been robbed of its prey, wished to blow them from its surface; but it was unable to accomplish its wish with these people. In the house, under the influence of warmth and whiskey, life returned to those who had been buried alive. They awakened and scanned each other with their eyes—then they looked around.

"In the name of the Father and the Son!" exclaimed Antoni, making a sign of the cross.

Marya noticed Andryanek, the girl, and the fire, and wept with happiness.

Tomoy sat opposite to her, looking into her eyes.

"My Lord!" said Antoni in a whisper. "Have I dreamt it, or was I a dead man? It's a good thing to live!"

"You would not be alive any longer had it not been for the dog," said the peasant; "and the girl saved you."

"God is merciful to us. Where did you find us, and by what miracle?"

"Behind the birch grove; the dogs led us. You may well say a miracle. You will remember my word. You will now be successful with everything, because the blizzard has not devoured you; and now nothing can harm you. I am ready to go into partnership with you for any business you say."

"It is not my luck—it is my wife's. If it were not for her, I should be a dead man to-day."

They were so weak that they could not stand. The wind entered the house, and the smoke from the chimney filled the room. It was dark and cold—one could hardly imagine worse surroundings.

"The devils are rejoicing over Shaman's death," said Andryanek.

Lukowski was sitting on the bench looking at the girl. The dogs lay at her feet, and she was silent and gloomy again. Sometimes she

looked from under her brows at Mrozowiecki. Finally, [Andryanek began to talk about the steppe, with which he had been familiar from child. He said he had never seen a storm like this.

"A few winters ago a whole wedding party was covered by a blizzard," he said indifferently. "Forty people and seven sleighs with the horses were lost, and could not be found. In the summer someone discovered them by chance. The sleighs, human beings, and horses were standing in a row; the grass and weeds covered them, and there were plenty of birds'-nests in the furs and felt. The hawks and foxes visited them; even the tarbagan were not afraid of them, although there were several rifles in the sleighs. In that way the steppe gives life and death! Listen how the blizzard howls. He is already tired and pretty soon he will lie down."

They all listened. Outside the breathing of the wind could only be heard from time to time. Then came a powerful roaring—and everything was quiet.

"The cold is coming!" said the peasant. "He is already tired of the noise and has raised his head—and everything becomes silent. He is lord of all."

In fact, the steppe was silent; the blizzard

was strangled to death. A silvery light streamed through the window, and in a moment the room was cold, and those inside shuddered. Outside there was great stillness, and the sky swarmed with millions of stars. The snow was turned to stone, and suddenly the ice on the lake cracked with a noise like thunder.

"It is the sign that the cold has won," said the peasant. "Had we deferred the rescue until now, you would not have been alive."

"Well, we were fated to live—such is our destiny," said Marya.

"And you will be happy ; you will see !"

Lukowski approached the girl and whispered something to her. Apparently she paid no attention to him ; but when towards morning they began to talk as to how they could get back without horses and sleighs, Lukowski said,

"You can all drive back in Andryanek's sleigh. I remain here ; I cannot leave my country-girl alone."

The peasant look at them laughingly.

"It's true," he affirmed.

At parting Marya embraced the girl and whispered something in her ear, at which she blushed.

Then Antoni said to her,

"Zoska, I judged you harshly ; pardon me. You have a good heart."

She looked at him.

"I loved you, therefore you are alive," she muttered. "Through me you were unhappy ; and now through me also you will be happy. Go, in God's name."

She turned quickly and caressed the dogs. The bells sounded for a long time through the thin air, and the sleigh moved like a boat over the silvery blue sea.

Andryanek whistled, and Marya said,

"Antoni, it is our last misfortune."

"Thank God !"



THE END.

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